JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

LANGUAGE AS POWER: ENGLISH AS BOTH COLONIZER'S TONGUE AND TOOL OF RESISTANCE IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS* AND MOHSIN HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

Dr. Devang Rangani
Assistant Professor of English,
General Department,
Shantilal Shah Government Engineering College,
Bhavnagar, Gujarat-364002

Abstract

The English language in postcolonial South Asia is a paradox: once a colonial imposition and an instrument of domination, it has now become a medium of self-expression and resistance. This paper studies the dual nature of English in Indian and Pakistani English literature through the novels of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997) and Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007). The writers use English to articulate voices that were historically marginalized, subverting its imperial authority by transforming it into a tool for identity, critique, and cultural hybridity. Drawing upon postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Bill Ashcroft, this study explores how Roy and Hamid re-appropriate English to challenge colonial narratives, question Western power structures, and redefine the relationship between language and nationhood in the postcolonial world.

Keywords: *Postcolonial Literature, English Language, Language as Power, Linguistic Resistance, Cultural Hybridity, Subaltern Voices, Identity and Globalization, Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse*

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

- **Introduction: The Paradox of Language**

When the British Empire introduced English education in India through Lord Macaulay's infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), it was intended to create "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." The purpose of English was not communication but control—an ideological tool to produce compliant colonial subjects. Yet, in the postcolonial era, the same language became the medium through which those subjects contested imperial authority.

Arundhati Roy and Mohsin Hamid exemplify this linguistic paradox. Writing from India and Pakistan—two nations born from the same colonial history—they both turn English into a vehicle for resistance and self-definition. As Bill Ashcroft et al. argue in *The Empire Writes Back*, "The imperial experience has left its imprint on language, but this imprint has been appropriated and transformed by postcolonial writers" (Ashcroft 38). For Roy and Hamid, English becomes both the colonizer's tongue and a creative weapon, enabling them to "write back to the empire" while addressing global audiences.

- Theoretical Framework: Postcolonialism and the Politics of Language

Language and power are inseparable in postcolonial discourse. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), "Language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner" (16). Ngũgĩ advocates writing in indigenous languages to truly decolonize thought. However, other theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Salman Rushdie suggest that colonial languages can be subverted and hybridized to express local realities.

Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*—the "Third Space" where colonial and native cultures interact—explains how language can become a site of negotiation rather than domination. English, when "indigenized," becomes neither wholly colonial nor entirely local but something new—a *postcolonial English*. Similarly,

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" questions whether marginalized subjects can ever truly speak within dominant discourse. Yet, writers like Roy and Hamid demonstrate that by reshaping English, the subaltern does speak—though in a transformed linguistic register.

- English in Indian Literature: Arundhati Roy's Linguistic Subversion

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers one of the most striking examples of linguistic rebellion in Indian English literature. Set in Kerala, the novel dismantles linguistic hierarchies by infusing English with Malayalam syntax, idioms, and local rhythms. Roy refuses to write "standard" English; instead, she invents a subversive, childlike, musical style that resists both colonial authority and patriarchal structures.

Roy's narrative voice mirrors the perspective of children—Estha and Rahel—whose fragmented understanding of the world is expressed through a disjointed, playful use of English. She writes, "Things can change in a day. One day, things can change. It's as though the world becomes a different place" (Roy 32). The repetition and circularity here mimic oral storytelling, replacing the linear, rational logic of the colonizer's language with the rhythms of indigenous speech.

Roy deliberately "Indianizes" English, using capitalization, neologisms, and local diction—"Ammu," "Kochu Thomban," "Kathakali men"—to resist linguistic homogeneity. As Aijaz Ahmad notes, such linguistic hybridity "challenges the authority of the Queen's English by showing that the colonized subject has made it her own" (Ahmad 77).

English in Roy's novel also becomes a political weapon to expose social marginalization, particularly caste oppression. The forbidden love between Ammu (an upper-caste woman) and Velutha (an untouchable) embodies the "Love Laws" that "lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much"

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

(Roy 33). English allows Roy to universalize a local story, giving caste oppression a global resonance.

However, Roy also dramatizes the failure of language—both English and Malayalam—to fully articulate trauma. The novel's elliptical style and fragmented grammar represent what Spivak calls "the silencing of the subaltern." Yet, by writing in English, Roy ensures that this silence is heard worldwide. Thus, English becomes a paradoxical space where silence speaks.

Roy feminizes English, transforming it from a masculine, colonial instrument into a voice of emotional, bodily, and intuitive experience. Her lyrical prose reclaims the "small things" that history neglects. In doing so, she echoes Bhabha's argument that mimicry and transformation within the colonizer's language can "unsettle the narcissistic demands of colonial authority" (Bhabha 86). Roy's use of English is not submission but strategic appropriation—a deliberate "misuse" of the master's tongue to narrate the lives of those excluded from official discourse.

- English in Pakistani Literature: Mohsin Hamid's Political Irony

While Roy reimagines English through linguistic experimentation, Mohsin Hamid uses it to interrogate power relations in a globalized, post-9/11 world. His novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) unfolds as a monologue by Changez, a Pakistani man recounting his disillusionment with America to an unnamed American listener in a Lahore café. The entire novel is written in polished, refined English—but it is weaponized through irony, inversion, and narrative ambiguity.

Changez's fluency in English initially symbolizes assimilation into Western capitalism. As he says, "I was a lover of America… I was happy to be among them" (Hamid 45). His linguistic and cultural competence make him a model postcolonial subject—the kind Macaulay envisioned. Yet, after 9/11, this very

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

language becomes a marker of suspicion. Changez realizes that linguistic mastery cannot erase racial and cultural difference.

Hamid thus exposes how English, though global, remains politically charged. It is the language of empire reincarnated as the language of neoliberal globalization. As Elleke Boehmer observes, "Global English reproduces colonial asymmetries under the guise of cosmopolitanism" (Boehmer 104).

The monologic structure of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* allows Hamid to reverse the power dynamic between East and West. Changez narrates in perfect English, but the American listener never speaks—a subtle reversal of colonial hierarchy. The Pakistani subject now commands the linguistic and narrative power, while the Westerner becomes silent and objectified.

Hamid's use of second-person address—"Excuse me, sir, but may I offer you my seat?" (Hamid 1)—creates intimacy and unease. The reader becomes complicit, trapped in the ambiguity of Changez's tone. The English language, once the tool of Western rationality, becomes a site of uncertainty. As critic Bart Moore-Gilbert argues, "Hamid turns English into a performative act that destabilizes its own authority" (Moore-Gilbert 212).

By the end of the novel, Changez reclaims his identity and his voice through English itself: "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the empire at first—until I chose to rebel" (Hamid 173). His rebellion is not only political but linguistic. He uses English to articulate an anti-imperial consciousness, transforming the colonizer's medium into a weapon of critique.

Like Roy, Hamid practices what Ashcroft calls "abrogation and appropriation"—rejecting colonial authority (abrogation) while reshaping English to express postcolonial reality (appropriation). Thus, English becomes a bridge between nations divided by history but united by the desire to speak back.

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

- Comparative Analysis: From Kerala to Lahore

Both Roy and Hamid use English to expose the contradictions of postcolonial societies, but their strategies differ.

Aspect	**Arundhati Roy (*India*)**	**Mohsin Hamid (*Pakistan*)**
Language Style	Experimental, poetic, infused with Malayalam; disrupts syntax.	Controlled, ironic, conversational; polished global English.
Power Focus	Internal hierarchies—caste, gender, and regional marginalization.	External hierarchies—West vs. Muslim East, globalization.
Voice of Resistance	Subaltern and feminine perspectives; reclaiming local rhythm.	Intellectual and political critique of Western hegemony.
Function of English	Rewriting colonial and patriarchal narratives.	Challenging global stereotypes and neocolonial power.

In both, English becomes a **"third space"** (Bhabha) where identities are negotiated rather than imposed. Their works prove that postcolonial writers can "own" English without being owned by it.

- Language, Identity, and the Global Reader

For both authors, English is not simply a medium—it is the message. Writing in English allows them to reach international audiences while simultaneously critiquing those audiences' assumptions. Roy's hybrid English foregrounds India's linguistic diversity, while Hamid's sleek global English reveals the new forms of imperialism embedded in globalization.

The politics of audience also matters. As Simon Gikandi notes, "Postcolonial writers write for a double audience—those at home and those abroad"

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

(Gikandi 56). Roy and Hamid walk this tightrope masterfully: their English is accessible to Western readers yet rooted in local experience. This dual address transforms English from a monolithic colonial language into a plural, polyphonic medium of resistance.

The postcolonial use of English cannot be reduced to betrayal or imitation. As Salman Rushdie famously wrote in *Imaginary Homelands*, "We can't simply use the English language; we must remake it" (Rushdie 17). Roy and Hamid exemplify this act of remaking. Their English is "impure," hybrid, and subversive. It destabilizes the myth of linguistic purity and demonstrates that power lies not in the language itself but in its use.

Thus, English in South Asia has evolved from an instrument of colonization into a medium of liberation—a process that mirrors the region's broader struggle for postcolonial self-definition. In Roy's Kerala and Hamid's Lahore, English becomes the sound of protest, memory, and rebirth.

Conclusion

The paradox of English in postcolonial South Asia lies in its dual legacy: the same language that once enslaved now liberates. Both Arundhati Roy and Mohsin Hamid inhabit this paradox with intellectual precision and creative defiance. They demonstrate that the politics of language is inseparable from the politics of identity, belonging, and power.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* turns English into a site of linguistic insurgency. By bending syntax, Indianizing vocabulary, and infusing the text with Malayalam rhythms, Roy dismantles the myth of linguistic purity. As she once remarked in an interview, "To me, English is not an alien language… It's just one of the tools I have handled with my own hands" (Roy, *Outlook*, 1997). This assertion captures the spirit of appropriation central to postcolonial aesthetics. Roy's English is not derivative—it is transformative.

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

Through it, she gives voice to those "small things" that official history silences, allowing the subaltern to speak, even if in fractured echoes.

Similarly, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reclaims English to question the moral authority of the West and the illusion of global neutrality. By addressing an unnamed American listener in flawless, ironic English, Hamid reverses the colonial gaze. His protagonist Changez declares, "I was never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker" (Hamid 33)—a subtle critique of the conditional belonging that English-speaking immigrants face in the globalized world. In this way, Hamid transforms English into a mirror that reflects Western anxiety and postcolonial confidence simultaneously.

The broader implication is that language, far from being a fixed colonial inheritance, becomes a living archive of resistance. As Homi Bhabha writes, "It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (*The Location of Culture* 2). Both Roy and Hamid write from those "interstices," transforming English into a hybrid space where colonial histories and postcolonial futures coexist.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o viewed English as "the language of the colonizer's conceptual domination" (*Decolonising the Mind* 18), but writers like Roy and Hamid prove that domination can be inverted through reinvention. Their works testify that English, when stripped of its imperial authority, can become "the language of those who have no language" (Spivak 308). In this sense, the English they wield is neither foreign nor fully native—it is, to borrow Salman Rushdie's phrase, "a new language, still in the process of being made" (*Imaginary Homelands* 17).

Ultimately, both authors reveal that language itself is a terrain of struggle. Roy uses it to expose internal hierarchies—caste, gender, and class—while Hamid employs it to critique external hierarchies—race, empire, and global

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

capitalism. In their hands, English becomes a double-edged instrument: one edge forged by history, the other sharpened by resistance.

Thus, the colonizer's tongue becomes a chorus of liberation. English, once a mark of servitude, is now a language of self-fashioning and defiance. Roy and Hamid exemplify the postcolonial conviction that meaning and power reside not in the language we inherit but in the ways we choose to reimagine it. As Bill Ashcroft and his co-authors observe, "The moment the colonial language is appropriated and transformed, it ceases to be a symbol of power and becomes a means of power" (*The Empire Writes Back* 39).

Through the voices of Kerala and Lahore, Roy and Hamid prove that the empire does not merely "write back"—it rewrites the very language of empire itself.

Works Cited:

Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures.* Verso, 1992.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* Routledge, 1989.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, 1994.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors.* Oxford UP, 2005.

Gikandi, Simon. *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature.* Cornell UP, 1992.

Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.* Penguin, 2007.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* Heinemann, 1986.

JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY
A REFEREED INTERNATIONAL & PEER-REVIEWED
ISSN: 2349-0209
Volume-13, Issue-2, October- 2025

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things.* IndiaInk, 1997.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991.* Granta, 1991.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, U of Illinois P, 1988, pp. 271–313.