



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Imperial Legacies and Postcolonial Discourses: Miscommunication and Identity in *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*

Sayada Mahfuza Habib <sup>1,\*</sup> and Md. Elius Hossain <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MA in English Studies, Department of English, Jahangirnagar University A, 59/40 Jaleshwar Road 02, Savar, Dhaka 1340. Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, City University Dhaka, Bangladesh.

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 16(02), 192-201

Publication history: Received on 24 June 2025; revised on 02 August 2025; accepted on 04 August 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.16.2.2289>

### Abstract

The paper aims to explore the role of miscommunication and fragmented identity in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, focusing on how broken conversations illuminate cultural estrangement across colonial and postcolonial India. Although both novels have received substantial critical attention, the intersection between communicative collapse and identity dislocation remains a comparatively neglected dimension, particularly in relation to narrative structure and symbolic geography. This aspect gains significance when situated within each author's engagement with historical rupture and the ethics of empathy. To address this gap, the paper adopts a qualitative research approach centered on close textual analysis. It investigates pivotal scenes such as the Mara bar Caves incident and Estha's courtroom silence supported by secondary sources, including academic journal articles and theoretical commentaries grounded in Edward Said's critique of Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. The findings suggest that miscommunication is not merely incidental to plot but intrinsic to each author's philosophical critique of voice, agency, and the limits of cultural understanding. Ultimately, the paper argues that Forster and Roy deploy silence, dissonance, and symbolic settings as strategies to expose fractured subjectivities and dramatize resistance, where failed dialogue becomes a conduit for existential and postcolonial inquiry.

**Keywords:** Miscommunication; Identity; Postcolonialism; Silence; Symbolism; Resistance

### 1. Introduction

Communication lies at the heart of human connection but when it breaks down, it exposes deep wounds that transcend speech. In literature, particularly within postcolonial contexts, failed conversations and silences often signify more than interpersonal misunderstanding; they uncover long histories of injustice, mistrust, and fractured identity. Just as Dickinson reimagines death to make it more emotionally legible, E.M. Forster and Arundhati Roy deploy miscommunication as a symbolic and narrative device to dramatize cultural estrangement and the complexities of selfhood within colonial and postcolonial India.

In *A Passage to India* (1924), Forster explores the brittle tensions of British imperial rule through the eyes of characters caught in the snares of prejudice, political detachment, and failed empathy. Set in Chandrapore during the Raj, the novel foregrounds the Mara bar Caves episode, where a broken conversation leads to a crisis of interpretation, legal injustice, and cultural alienation. Scholars note how Forster's narrative reproduces psychological mechanisms shaped by colonial power structures, operating within what DiCicco calls the "peculiar locus of ambiguities and reticence" generated by Western ideologies (39). Forster's treatment of colonial concerns between East and West through characterization and plot further complicates relational intimacy within imperial India (Habib 295). These tensions reflect the Orientalist

\* Corresponding author: Sayada Mahfuza Habib

binaries critiqued by Edward Said, who argued that Western narratives systematically constructed the East as exotic, inferior, and ideologically useful to imperial control (*Orientalism* 3).

Decades later, Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) revisits India's postcolonial landscape, constructing a story through fragmented memory, social silence, and emotional estrangement. Set in Kerala, her novel portrays how caste politics, gender trauma, and linguistic suppression shape identities in ways equally fraught and irreconcilable. Both texts, though separated by time, converge in their treatment of disrupted dialogue and symbolic geography as tools for narrating dislocation. According to Alam Zeb et al., such postcolonial literature plays an active role in recovering suppressed histories and contesting hegemonic discourse through language and storytelling (205). In this space of cultural collision, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity offers a useful lens highlighting how fractured speech and unstable identities emerge from the "Third Space" where colonial and native cultures intertwine and resist fixed categorization (*The Location of Culture* 56).

Theoretical contributions from Said and Bhabha help unpack how language, silence, and space function as postcolonial critiques. Yet, even Said's own framework contains contradictions, as scholars observe that it marginalizes African contexts and exhibits a "male-cent red and heterosexual bias" in its analysis of imperial desire (DiCicco 38). Meanwhile, studies on illocutionary speech acts suggest that gendered communication styles and directive language often exacerbate relational tensions underscoring miscommunication as a structural rather than incidental feature (Nwachukwu et al. 68).

While these novels have garnered extensive critical attention, the intimate link between miscommunication and identity formation remains a comparatively underexplored dimension. Scholars often approach dialogue breakdown as a thematic byproduct rather than as a structural and philosophical lens through which imperial and emotional crises unfold. This paper addresses that gap by examining broken conversations as a shared narrative motif emphasizing how failed speech both reflects and reshapes identity within contested historical frames.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze how Forster and Roy use miscommunication, silence, and symbolic geography to expose emotional fragmentation and cultural incomprehension. Through qualitative textual analysis of key scenes such as Adela's misinterpreted experience and Estha's courtroom silence supported by postcolonial literary scholarship, the study offers a comparative perspective on how fractured communication narrates fractured identity. Ultimately, this paper argues that both authors transform miscommunication into a literary tool of resistance and revelation. Rather than resolving misunderstanding, they dramatize its existential consequences showing how broken speech mirrors broken selves in the shadows of empire and memory.

---

## 2. The research methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research approach grounded in close textual analysis and enriched by secondary scholarly discourse. Its central aim is to investigate how E.M. Forster and Arundhati Roy construct miscommunication as both a narrative mechanism and a symbolic device. Through this lens, the study explores how fractured dialogue contributes to the dislocation and reconstitution of identity within the sociopolitical contexts of colonial and postcolonial India.

Close textual analysis facilitates a detailed interpretation of the linguistic, thematic, and spatial dimensions of miscommunication in *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*. Specific scenes such as Adela Quester's disorientation in the Mara bar Caves and Estha's silence in the courtroom are examined with attention to tone, narrative fragmentation, and environmental setting. Particular emphasis is placed on disrupted speech, silences, and symbolic geography, each functioning as markers of emotional estrangement, cultural tension, and epistemic uncertainty. The caves' echo, the Monachal River, and courtroom dialogues are analyzed as powerful representations of communicative collapse and identity negotiation (McKinnon 2).

To contextualize these textual insights, the paper draws on secondary sources including peer-reviewed articles, critical essays, and theoretical frameworks. Central to this interpretive engagement are Edward Said's critique of Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which help situate the novels within broader postcolonial discourses on cultural misrepresentation, identity fragmentation, and historical trauma. A modest form of secondary qualitative analysis is also undertaken not to reiterate established conclusions, but to extract fresh perspectives from the intersection of literary evidence and critical tradition (Heaton 34). This layering of interpretation allows for a nuanced understanding of miscommunication as a literary response to systemic silence, social alienation, and historical rupture (Evans e87908).

The scope of this study is intentionally narrow. While both novels explore a wide range of themes, the analysis remains focused on broken conversations and identity construction as closely connected ideas. Broader considerations such as those pertaining to gender, caste, or psychological trauma though significant, lie outside the paper's immediate focus. By combining close textual inquiry with postcolonial theoretical engagement, this methodology offers a rigorous pathway for understanding how Forster and Roy transform communicative failure into a lens for resistance and existential reflection (Gross Oehme 2).

---

### 3. Literature review

A wide spectrum of scholars has explored Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, focusing variously on activism, identity, gender, hybridity, stylistic innovation, and postcolonial critique. However, many of these interpretations, while rich in thematic breadth, tend to treat miscommunication as a secondary outcome overlooking its deeper function as a structural and philosophical device. In what follows, this paper repositions communicative collapse as the critical lens through which fractured identity and cultural estrangement are dramatized.

Beginning with Roy, Vallese's reading emphasizes the transgression of cultural and political borders, connecting Roy's fiction to environmental activism and social dissent. She illustrates how characters navigate fragmented national and bodily boundaries through mythic realism and resistance (161). Although Vallese insightfully maps spatial and political tension, she does not engage with narrative silence or communicative failure elements central to the framework of this study.

In contrast, Devi shifts attention to Forster, examining his representation of distorted relationships and cultural misunderstanding under imperial authority. Her analysis of motifs such as "fences and gulfs" (223) aptly reveals barriers to connection, but it treats miscommunication as a surface symptom rather than as a narrative force. An interpretive gap this paper addresses through symbolic and textual scrutiny. A similar emphasis appears in Hani Neema's discussion of friendship in *A Passage to India*. He concludes that genuine intimacy is obstructed by "equality and freedom" deficits (c698), yet his focus remains ideological, leaving unexplored how dialogue itself breaks down in the narrative's spatial and emotional terrain.

Turning back to Roy's treatment of resistance, Dizzy links personal identity with postcolonial defiance, arguing that activism affirms selfhood in the face of gender oppression (70). This is further echoed in Anjum's analysis of subaltern voice, where characters like Ammu and Valuta struggle to be heard in a "cacophony of life" (327). However, both studies regard silence as thematic evidence of marginalization, rather than examining its narrative structure or philosophical weight.

Rashid's feminist perspective similarly highlights Roy's portrayal of caste and gender oppression. He identifies resistance within character defiance but does not interrogate how Roy crafts silence and fragmented speech to embody fractured subjectivity (Rashid 144). This oversight parallels Krista's application of Memmi's colonial theory to Forster, where miscommunication is noted as central yet not examined narratively (27). Likewise, Nafi acknowledges interpersonal collapse across cultures (15), but his reading lacks an analysis of how language fails within the text's structure.

Stylistic contributions further broaden the landscape of critique. Fernandez explores Roy's linguistic hybridity, celebrating her integration of Malayalam within English syntax (3), yet she does not consider dissonance as symbolic or emotionally revelatory. The same formal gap appears in the work of Vafa and Zeringue, who examine orientalist stereotypes in Forster through Said and Fanon (793), but overlook how disrupted communication enacts this psychological colonization. Makhijani's exploration of identity crisis and cognitive disruption (274) gestures toward instability, yet does not map this disorientation onto the breakdown of speech.

Ali, through hybridity theory, interprets Roy's narrative as a negotiation of unstable identity (74), though she refrains from drawing connections between hybrid speech and silence as acts of resistance. Meanwhile, Hariharasudan and Thanamalar's narratological approach highlights Roy's postmodern devices such as irony, pastiche, and metafiction (13823) enriching stylistic analysis while leaving communicative collapse underdeveloped.

Gendered readings by Rafiee and Deedra integrate Spivak's lens to study subaltern women's agency (134), but do not examine how suppressed speech enacts internalized oppression. Nandi reveals ambivalence in Roy's portrayal of the subaltern (175), yet does not interpret narrative silence as emotional rupture. Similarly, Kuni and Kuni's ecofeminist critique (01) foregrounds symbolic nature relationships but omits how communicative breakdown parallels ecological and cultural vulnerability. Finally, Saharan emphasizes cultural conflict in Forster (785), and Pariente applies

Orientalism and Occidentalism to critique discursive power structures (07), but both analyses stop short of engaging silence or miscommunication as ontological critiques embedded in the narrative.

Taken together, the collected research offers valuable insights into gender, narratology, ecocriticism, cultural borders, and colonial power, but often treats miscommunication as a secondary theme rather than a narrative and philosophical core. This paper departs from those readings by positioning communicative failure and symbolic geography as literary strategies that Forster and Roy use to dramatize fractured subjectivity, historical rupture, and the limits of empathy. Through key scenes such as Adela Quester's courtroom breakdown and Estha's interior silence, the study argues that broken speech functions as a site of existential inquiry and postcolonial resistance. Silence, dissonance, and linguistic collapse are not incidental they shape the architecture of each novel's critique. By conducting close textual analysis of these passages, the study proposes that communicative collapse is not a narrative void but a tool of disruption, where voice is redefined through absence and power is questioned through reticence.

---

## 4. Discussion and Analysis

In *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*, E.M. Forster and Arundhati Roy show how people struggle to understand each other in colonial and postcolonial India. In Forster's novel, the Mara bar Caves confuse and disturb the characters. The echo inside the caves makes words lose their meaning, showing how hard it is for British and Indian people to truly connect. In Roy's novel, silence becomes a way to stay safe. Estha does not speak because speaking could cause harm. Ammu's love is judged because of caste and gender rules. Their voices are ignored, and their feelings are hidden. Both novels use quiet, broken sentences and strong images to show how identity falls apart when people cannot speak or are not heard. The places in each novel the caves and the river also help tell this story. They hold emotions and secrets that words cannot explain.

### 4.1. Miscommunication as a Manifestation of Colonial and Postcolonial Tension

Miscommunication functions as a central motif that dramatizes the sociopolitical fractures of colonial and postcolonial India in both *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*. Whether through the echoing void of the Mara bar Caves or the strategic silences of Estha and Ammu, both novels portray language not as a bridge but as a barrier one that collapses under the weight of history, caste, and cultural estrangement. In *A Passage to India*, the Mara bar Caves symbolize the futility of cross-cultural understanding. The echo inside the caves is described as "entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies... 'boom'" (Forster 147). This sound, which reduces all utterances to a meaningless vibration, becomes a metaphor for colonial discourse itself flattening nuance, erasing empathy, and rendering communication impossible. Mrs. Moore, once a figure of moral clarity, emerges from the caves spiritually shattered: "She had only heard 'boom'; she had not been touched, been penetrated... she returned without much reaction to the surface of life" (Forster 148). Her disillusionment reflects the collapse of imperial idealism and the failure of language to mediate cultural difference. As Macchiarini et al. suggest, "issues of memory, commemoration and the legacy of colonialism... expose the lingering presence and impact of imperial power" in symbolic spaces (827), like the caves that resist dialogue and absorb meaning. Adela Quester's experience in the caves further illustrates this breakdown. Her confusion "I went into this detestable cave... and then, as I was saying, there was this shadow... It seemed like an age... He never actually touched me once" (Forster 188) reveals the instability of perception and the unreliability of speech. The incident, never fully explained, becomes a narrative void that divides communities and exposes the fragility of colonial justice.

In *The God of Small Things*, miscommunication takes the form of silence a survival strategy in a society governed by caste, patriarchy, and trauma. Estha's muteness during Valuta's trial is not passive but deeply political: "Estha stood silently. He kept his mouth shut. That was his contribution" (Roy 13). His silence protects him but condemns Valuta, whose voice is never heard in court. This enforced muteness reflects the systemic erasure of the subaltern, where speech itself becomes dangerous. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni notes, "particular language and discourse concealed global imperial designs" (48), echoing Roy's depiction of speech as complicit in structural violence. Roy's narrative structure fragmented, nonlinear, and lyrical mirrors the disjointed nature of postcolonial identity. Ammu's forbidden love with Valuta is narrated through gaps and ellipses, never fully articulated. The "Love Laws" that dictate "who should be loved. And how. And how much" (Roy 33) are never spoken aloud, yet they govern every character's fate. Miscommunication here is not a failure of language but a symptom of social repression. The Monachal River, like the Mara bar Caves, becomes a symbolic space where language dissolves. During Ammu and Valuta's final meeting, "Their bodies burned, their souls evaporated. And in the river, all sound was swallowed" (Roy 218). As Demissie writes, "colonial architecture and urbanism played pivotal roles in shaping... spatial and social structures" (155); the river, in this metaphorical sense, embodies postcolonial architecture that swallows voices rather than amplifies them.

Both novels suggest that miscommunication is not incidental but structural embedded in the sociopolitical fabric of India. Forster's colonial characters speak past one another, trapped in stereotypes and imperial arrogance. Roy's postcolonial characters are silenced by caste, gender, and memory. As Parashar and Schulz argue, "insular nationalisms and racisms... require deeper critique" (867), reminding us that fractured dialogue continues into the postcolonial present. In both cases, the failure to communicate reveals deeper truths: that language, when shaped by power, can obscure more than it reveals. As Aziz bitterly reflects, "Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. Never to be friends with the English!" (Forster 302). His disillusionment marks the end of any hope for cross-cultural dialogue. Similarly, Roy's narrator observes that "It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. The Sky. The Trees. The river. As though they had been given instructions to be normal" (Roy 213). This eerie stillness underscores the emotional void left by silenced voices and broken connections. Ultimately, both Forster and Roy use miscommunication to interrogate identity, power, and historical rupture. Whether through echo or silence, their characters navigate landscapes where speech fails and meaning collapses revealing the enduring consequences of colonial and postcolonial tension. In Hegde's words, "the English language and communication serve as a space for defining failure and promoting the remedy of self-development" (207) yet these "remedies" are fraught, often exacerbating rather than bridging the colonial abyss.

#### 4.2. Fractured Identity Through Narrative and Structural Silence

Fractured identity emerges not only through character experience but through the very structure of the narrative. Both Forster and Roy use silence, ellipsis, and fragmentation to reflect how broken conversations dismantle coherent selfhood in *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*. Their protagonists Aziz, Estha, and Ammu are shaped by imperial and postcolonial pressures that render speech unreliable and identity unstable. Dr. Aziz's identity in *A Passage to India* is caught between contradictory roles: the hospitable host and the suspected criminal, the loyal friend and the betrayed subject. His oscillation between warmth and defensiveness reflects the psychological toll of colonial surveillance. Early in the novel, Aziz is described as "impetuous and flighty," shifting moods rapidly, "from childlike elation to utter despair" (Forster 63). This instability is not mere temperament it reflects the colonial condition, where identity is constantly negotiated under the gaze of empire. Aziz's fragmentation intensifies after the Mara bar Caves incident. His trial becomes a spectacle of imperial mistrust, and his sense of self begins to unravel. As Mendenhall explains, Forster "subverts a wide range of actual legal practices, most notably colonial trial procedures," thereby exposing the law's complicity in imperial control (315). Aziz's bitterness deepens: "I wish I'd never seen the English. They are a bad race; they are not honest" (Forster 203). This moment of rupture marks a turning point: Aziz no longer seeks reconciliation but retreats into cultural isolation. The narrative mirrors this shift through abrupt tonal changes and withheld resolution. The friendship between Fielding and Aziz, once central, ends ambiguously: "No, not yet," Fielding says when asked if they can be friends again. "No, not there" (Forster 322). The repetition and ellipsis signal emotional distance and unresolved tension.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores identity fragmentation through postcolonial trauma, especially in the characters of Estha and Ammu. Estha's silence is not just a response to fear it is a lifelong condition shaped by betrayal, guilt, and caste violence. "Estha had always been a quiet child. But now he had stopped talking altogether" (Roy 12). His muteness becomes a metaphor for postcolonial estrangement, where speech is dangerous and memory unbearable. Ammu's identity is similarly fractured by gender and caste. Her relationship with Valuta, a Paravane, violates the "Love Laws" that dictate "who should be loved. And how. And how much" (Roy 33). This transgression leads to her social erasure and emotional collapse. Roy writes, "Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge... She was thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a woman who had been loved by a man who was forbidden to touch her" (Roy 161). As Al-Quaderi and Islam emphasize, "transgressions... outside the boundaries of the institution of marriage... lead to a scathing interrogation of postcolonial Indian society" (62), marking Ammu's story as one of resistance as well as silencing. The fragmented syntax and abrupt transitions reflect Ammu's disintegration not just physically, but existentially.

Roy's narrative structure reinforces this fragmentation. The novel's non-linear timeline, frequent interruptions, and elliptical phrasing mirror the characters' psychological dislocation. The story opens not with exposition but with disjointed memories: "May in Aye Menem is a hot, brooding month... The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust green trees" (Roy 1). The sensory overload and lack of narrative orientation reflect Rahel's fractured recollection, shaped by trauma and time. Roy's linguistic innovation, as Koç argues, "transforms standard English into an effective tool of communicating the postcolonial subject's experiences of subalternity" (127), using structural and symbolic rupture to reflect emotional fragmentation. Estha and Rahel's twinship further complicates identity. They are described as "one person who had once been two. Separate but inseparable. Twins from whom the world had taken something" (Roy 5). This paradox unity and division echoes the postcolonial condition, where identity is both inherited and disrupted. Their shared silence, especially in the History House scene, becomes a form of resistance and mourning. "They lay like small animals... flattened and pressed against each other, in a hideous huddle" (Roy 292). The imagery evokes vulnerability and erasure, where language fails and only bodily presence remains. Arafat and

Awan's reading supports this tension between modern influence and native memory: "Roy's characters... are strongly influenced by the modern Western values and their native culture is significantly altered" (79), where fixed identity becomes plastic and unstable.

Both novels use structural silence to reflect fractured identity. Forster's prose often withholds emotional resolution, using ellipses and interruptions to signal disconnection. Roy's lyrical fragmentation capitalized phrases, broken syntax, and recursive imagery creates a rhythm of rupture. As Nightshade and Zeringue argue, *A Passage to India* "privileges the European as 'Us', while the Indians... are presented as 'Other'," reinforcing internal divisions through colonial discourse (23). In both cases, narrative form becomes a mirror of psychological fragmentation. Aziz's final retreat into cultural separatism is not triumphant but melancholic. "India shall be a nation! No foreigners here! No foreigners like me!" (Forster 314). His identity, once hybrid and hopeful, becomes rigid and defensive. Similarly, Estha's silence and Ammu's death mark the failure of postcolonial healing. Their identities are not restored but scattered across memory, space, and silence.

### 4.3. Symbolic Spaces as Sites of Communicative Collapse

Symbolic spaces such as the Mara bar Caves and the Monachal River function as metaphysical and narrative voids sites where language fails, meaning dissolves, and identity is both exposed and erased in *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things*. These spaces do not merely host events; they enact collapse. They absorb speech, distort perception, and resist interpretation, becoming emblematic of the impossibility of dialogue in colonial and postcolonial India.

The Mara bar Caves in Forster's novel are introduced as "extraordinary caves" located in the "fingers" of the Mara bar Hills, yet their extraordinariness is never fully explained (Forster 12). Inside, sound loses its specificity: "The echo in a Mara bar cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies... 'boom'" (Forster 147). This echo, which renders all utterances indistinguishable, becomes a metaphor for imperial epistemological failure. As Dag Hamin argues, the "deformed interracial relationship and mutual mistrust between colonizer and colonized" are embodied in symbolic breakdowns like these (192). The British characters, despite their administrative authority, cannot interpret India's landscape or its people. The caves resist translation, and in doing so, they resist empire.

Mrs. Moore's spiritual collapse after her visit to the caves underscores this failure. She is overwhelmed by the echo's nihilism: "She had only heard 'boom'; she had not been touched, been penetrated... she returned without much reaction to the surface of life" (Forster 148). Her Christian faith and moral certainties dissolve into apathy. The caves do not offer revelation they offer void. As Forster writes, "Nothing, nothing attaches to them" (Forster 165). This detachment reflects the colonial inability to connect meaningfully with India, where even the landscape refuses to be legible. Crane's reading of colonial architecture identifies such spaces the British Club, the court, the caves as "islands" where colonial separation and isolation are sustained symbolically (17). Adela Quester's experience in the caves further dramatizes communicative collapse. Her fragmented recollection "I went into this detestable cave... and then, as I was saying, there was this shadow... It seemed like an age... He never actually touched me once" (Forster 188) becomes the basis for a legal and cultural crisis. The ambiguity of her speech, the gaps in her memory, and the echo's distortion all contribute to a narrative void that cannot be resolved. The caves, in this sense, are not just physical spaces but epistemic abysses where colonial discourse implodes.

In *The God of Small Things*, the Monachal River performs a similar function. It is a space of forbidden emotion, silenced truth, and submerged memory. Ammu and Valuta's transgressive love unfolds by the river, yet it is never spoken aloud. Roy writes, "She saw nothing that Jesus could not see. She smelled the river. And she could smell Valuta, and she could feel his arms around her" (Roy 336). The river becomes a witness to a love that defies caste and convention, yet it also becomes the site of Valuta's death and Ammu's erasure. Suparna Roy describes this as part of "a stratified layering of marginalization... upheld by caste and gender boundaries" (1629), positioning the river as a site of both repression and emotional overflow. Estha and Rahel's emotional trauma is likewise tied to the river. After Sophie Mol's drowning, the river becomes a repository of guilt and silence. Roy describes it as "grey green. Like rippled silk. With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it" (Roy 118). This lyrical description masks its danger. The river swells with memory, but it does not speak. It absorbs voices, secrets, and pain. During Ammu and Valuta's final meeting, "Their bodies burned, their souls evaporated. And in the river, all sound was swallowed" (Roy 218). Like the caves, the river consumes language, rendering emotion untranslatable.

Roy's narrative structure reinforces this collapse. The novel opens with disjointed memories and sensory fragments: "May in Aye Menem is a hot, brooding month... The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust green trees" (Roy 1). The Monachal is present from the beginning, not as a setting but as a mood fluid, oppressive, and

omnipresent. It is a character in its own right, shaping and silencing the lives around it. Sack sick interprets this as Roy's use of "horizon" imagery absent yet present as a figurative boundary of expression, a "line of flight" for language itself (81). In other words, symbolic spaces like the river hold contradictions between visibility and invisibility, speech and silence, presence and void.

Roy's experiment with language, as Ahmad notes, "questions and experiments with identity through symbols... language, politics, culture, and human relationships" (210). These symbols rivers, houses, bodily gesture function as carriers of affect, able to collapse meaning or hint at suppressed truths. Both Forster and Roy use symbolic geography to dramatize the impossibility of dialogue. In the caves, meaning is echoed into oblivion; in the river, truth is submerged and silenced. These spaces resist narrative closure. They refuse to be explained, categorized, or resolved. Instead, they expose the limits of language and the fragility of identity. Aziz's final reflection "Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. Never to be friends with the English!" (Forster 302) captures the emotional residue of communicative collapse. The cycle of misunderstanding and failed connection is embodied in the geography itself. Similarly, Roy's narrator observes, "It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. The Sky. The Trees. The river. As though they had been given instructions to be normal" (Roy 213). This eerie stillness reflects the emotional void left by silenced voices and broken connections.

Ultimately, the Mara bar Caves and the Monachal River are not just settings they are philosophical spaces. They embody the impossibility of dialogue, the collapse of meaning, and the fragmentation of identity. In these spaces, speech fails, memory falters, and selfhood dissolves. Forster and Roy do not seek to resolve these collapses; they illuminate them, showing how symbolic geography can narrate the unspeakable.

---

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has explored the intricate relationship between miscommunication and identity construction in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, focusing on how broken conversations and symbolic spaces expose cultural estrangement and emotional fragmentation within colonial and postcolonial India. Both novels reveal that communicative collapse whether through literal misunderstanding or structural silence serves as a powerful narrative mechanism through which identity is shaped, dismantled, and dramatized. The thesis that miscommunication functions not simply as a thematic concern, but as a philosophical and political motif, has been substantiated through three analytical axes: the Mara bar Caves and the Monachal River as sites of epistemic void; the fragmentation of Aziz, Estha, and Ammu's identities through dialogue failure and suppressed speech; and the authors' use of narrative interruption, ellipsis, and spatial metaphor to mirror internal dislocation. These insights demonstrate that miscommunication in both novels is deeply embedded in the sociopolitical fabric of India. In Forster's colonial setting, failed speech reflects imperial arrogance and emotional dissonance, while in Roy's postcolonial landscape, silence becomes a survival tool amid caste and familial oppression. The symbolic geographies constructed by both authors the echoing caves and the absorbing river embody the untranslatability of experience, where language fails to mediate trauma, and identity is either exposed or erased. The broader significance of this comparative reading lies in its contribution to postcolonial literary discourse. It reveals how miscommunication can illuminate historical rupture and human vulnerability, offering a lens through which identity formation and cultural resistance may be examined beyond spoken words. Rather than resolving misunderstanding, Forster and Roy amplify its existential weight presenting fractured conversations as conduits for philosophical reflection and literary revolt. Ultimately, this study affirms that silence and miscommunication are not narrative voids but meaningful textures. In the absence of dialogue, these authors cultivate a language of emotional resonance, where identity is articulated through what remains unsaid echoes, absences, and the quiet weight of history.

---

## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

---

## References

- [1] Al-Quaderi, Golam Gaus, and Muhammad Saiful Islam. "Complicity and resistance: Women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies*, vol. 2, no. 4, Dec. 2011, pp. 62–78. [www.scribd.com/document/138683029/Complicity-and-Resistance-Women-in-Arunduti-Roy-the-God-of-Small-Things](http://www.scribd.com/document/138683029/Complicity-and-Resistance-Women-in-Arunduti-Roy-the-God-of-Small-Things). 2023, pp. 126–143. <https://doi.org/10.53048/johass.1258879>.

- [2] Arafat, Dr. Yasir, and Maryam Nadeem Awan. "Plasticity and Marginalization in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Liquid Modern Reading." *UNIVERSITY OF CHITRAL JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2020, pp. 79–87. [jll.uoch.edu.pk/index.php/jll/article/view/145](http://jll.uoch.edu.pk/index.php/jll/article/view/145).
- [3] Ahmad, Rabiya. "Indigenous Identity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 7, no. 3, Jan. 2022, pp. 210–213. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.73.29>.
- [4] Ali, Halimah Mohamed. "Indigenous Identity and Hybridity in the Indian Context As Portrayed in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *Journal of Social Sciences (COESandRJ-JSS)*, vol. 7, no. 2, Apr. 2018, pp. 74–85. [www.researchgate.net/publication/325005820\\_Indigenous\\_Identity\\_and\\_Hybridity\\_in\\_the\\_Indian\\_Context\\_As\\_Portrayed\\_in\\_Arundhati\\_Roy%27s\\_The\\_God\\_of\\_Small\\_Things](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/325005820_Indigenous_Identity_and_Hybridity_in_the_Indian_Context_As_Portrayed_in_Arundhati_Roy%27s_The_God_of_Small_Things).
- [5] Aprianti, Delis. "The Potrayal of Orientalism and Occidentalism in the Novel 'A Passage to India' by E. M. Forster: Post Colonial Approach." *Channing Journal of English Language Education and Literature*, vol. 7, no. 1, Apr. 2022, pp. 7–12. [www.researchgate.net/publication/376004968\\_Portrayal\\_of\\_Orientalism\\_and\\_Occidentalism\\_in\\_the\\_novel\\_A\\_Passage\\_to\\_India\\_by\\_E\\_M\\_Forster\\_Post-Colonialism\\_Approach](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/376004968_Portrayal_of_Orientalism_and_Occidentalism_in_the_novel_A_Passage_to_India_by_E_M_Forster_Post-Colonialism_Approach).
- [6] Anjum, Dr. Shagufta. "The God of Small Things: The Silent Voice of Subaltern." *International Journal of English and Education*, vol. 3, no. 4, Oct. 2014, pp. 327–332. [www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&drct=jandopi=89978449&url=https://ijee.org/assets/docs/25\\_L.265144121.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjU3dCvzdyOAXJ-DgGHfmbJlqGFnoECBcQAQandusg=AOvVaw2IKpAUqUnFB1hCmaEWmWq0](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&drct=jandopi=89978449&url=https://ijee.org/assets/docs/25_L.265144121.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjU3dCvzdyOAXJ-DgGHfmbJlqGFnoECBcQAQandusg=AOvVaw2IKpAUqUnFB1hCmaEWmWq0).
- [7] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004.
- [8] Crane, Ralph. "Reading the Club As Colonial Island in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and George Orwell's *Burmese Days*." *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2011, pp. 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.249>.
- [9] Daghamin, Rashed. "E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*: Cultural Traumas and Deformed Interracial Relations." *International Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 192–199. <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijll.v7n1a21>.
- [10] Devi, Rajni. "Cultural Conflicts and Distorted Relationship in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*." *IJRAR-International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2017, pp. 223–226. [www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&drct=jandopi=89978449&url=https://ijrar.com/upload\\_issue/ijrar\\_issue\\_403.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjEmZXgydyOAXXjyigGHalxCBcQFnoECBgQAQandusg=AOvVaw0NoNM9zBE8rcFfg66OQHmM](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&drct=jandopi=89978449&url=https://ijrar.com/upload_issue/ijrar_issue_403.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjEmZXgydyOAXXjyigGHalxCBcQFnoECBgQAQandusg=AOvVaw0NoNM9zBE8rcFfg66OQHmM).
- [11] Demissie, Fassil. "Imperial Legacies and Postcolonial Predicaments: An Introduction." *African Identities*, vol. 5, no. 2, July 2007, pp. 155–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840701403317>.
- [12] Dizayi, Saman A. "Resistance and Identity in the *God of Small Things* Written by Arundhati Roy." *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 1, June 2021, pp. 70–75. <https://doi.org/10.14500/kujhss.v4n1y2021.pp70-75>. Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979.
- [13] Evans, Michael S. "A Computational Approach to Qualitative Analysis in Large Textual Datasets." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 9, no. 2, Feb. 2014, p. e87908. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0087908>.
- [14] Fernandez, Jasmine. "Reading Arundhati Roy's '*The God of Small Things*': A Stylistic Approach to Birth Cultural Meanings." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 4, no. 4, Jan. 2016, pp. 6–12. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0404002>.
- [15] Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. Harcourt, 1924.
- [16] Grosseohme, Daniel H. "Overview of Qualitative Research." *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, vol. 20, no. 3, June 2014, pp. 109–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2014.925660>.
- [17] Habib, Md. Jakaria. "Cultural Conflicts in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*: A Postcolonial Perspective." *Scholars Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 6, June 2022, pp. 295–298. <https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2022.v10i06.008>.
- [18] Heaton, Janet. "Secondary analysis of qualitative data: an overview." *SSOAR*, vol. 33, no. 3, Jan. 2008, pp. 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.33.2008.3.33-45>.
- [19] Hegde, Radha S. "Speaking Miscommunication: Bridging a Postcolonial Abyss." *Media Theory*, vol. 5, no. 2, Mar. 2022, pp. 207–222. <https://doi.org/10.70064/mt.v5i2.921>.

- [20] Hariharasudan, A., and P. Thavabalan. "Narrativity in Postmodern Text: A Study of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics*, vol. 119, no. 12, 2018, pp. 13823–13828. [www.researchgate.net/publication/325557758\\_Narrativity\\_in\\_Postmodern\\_Text\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Arundhati\\_Roy%27s\\_The\\_God\\_of\\_Small\\_Things](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/325557758_Narrativity_in_Postmodern_Text_A_Study_of_Arundhati_Roy%27s_The_God_of_Small_Things).
- [21] Koç, Nesrin. "Deconstructing the Language Laws: Arundhati Roy's Linguistic Strategies in the *God of Small Things*." *İnsan Ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, vol. 6, no. 1, May
- [22] Khrisat, Abdulhafeth Ali. "The Tension of the Social Relations Between the Colonizer and the Colonized in Forster's *a Passage to India*." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Oct. 2013, pp. 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n10p27>.
- [23] Kunhi, Rukhaya M., and Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi. "An Ecocritical Perspective of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *SAGE Open*, vol. 7, no. 2, Apr. 2017, pp. 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017712767>.
- [24] Makhijani, Anshika. "The Colonial Otherness in E.M. Forster's *a Passage to India*." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 2, Jan. 2019, pp. 274–278. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.4.2.13>.
- [25] McKinnon, Sara. *Text-Based Approaches to Qualitative Research*. 1st ed., vol. 7, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2013, [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444361506.wbiems185](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444361506.wbiems185).
- [26] Mechkarini, Sara, et al. "Unmasking the Colonial Past: Memory, Narrative, and Legacy." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 51, no. 5, Sept. 2023, pp. 825–841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2023.2262873>.
- [27] Mendenhall, Allen. "Mass of Madness: Jurisprudence in E. M. Forster's *a Passage to India*." *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 6, no. 2, Oct. 2011, pp. 315–337. <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2011.0018>.
- [28] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. "Coloniality of Power in Development Studies and the Impact of Global Imperial Designs on Africa." *Australasian Review of African Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, Dec. 2012, pp. 48–73. [afsaap.org.au/assets/ARAS\\_Vol\\_XXXIII\\_2\\_Ndlovu-Gatsheni1.pdf](http://afsaap.org.au/assets/ARAS_Vol_XXXIII_2_Ndlovu-Gatsheni1.pdf).
- [29] Naghshbandi, Frouzan, and Bahman Zarrinjooee. "Englishness in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*." *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2015, pp. 23–29. [www.researchgate.net/publication/360189470\\_Englishness\\_in\\_E\\_M\\_Forster%27s\\_A\\_Passage\\_to\\_India](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/360189470_Englishness_in_E_M_Forster%27s_A_Passage_to_India).
- [30] Nafi, Jamal Subhi Isma. "SKEPTICISM AND DOUBT: A STUDY OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN E.M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 16–27. [www.researchgate.net/publication/302293303\\_SKEPTICISM\\_AND\\_DOUBT\\_A\\_STUDY\\_OF\\_INTERPERSONAL\\_RELATIONSHIPS\\_IN\\_EM\\_FORSTER%27S\\_A\\_PASSAGE\\_TO\\_INDIA](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/302293303_SKEPTICISM_AND_DOUBT_A_STUDY_OF_INTERPERSONAL_RELATIONSHIPS_IN_EM_FORSTER%27S_A_PASSAGE_TO_INDIA).
- [31] Nandi, Miriam. "Longing for the lost (m)other – Postcolonial ambivalences in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 46, no. 2, May 2010, pp. 175–186. [www.researchgate.net/publication/233265187\\_Longing\\_for\\_the\\_lost\\_mother\\_-\\_Postcolonial\\_ambivalences\\_in\\_Arundhati\\_Roy%27s\\_The\\_God\\_of\\_Small\\_Things](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/233265187_Longing_for_the_lost_mother_-_Postcolonial_ambivalences_in_Arundhati_Roy%27s_The_God_of_Small_Things).
- [32] Neamah, Hani Oudah. "Friendship In *Passage to India* by E.M. Forster." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, vol. 11, no. 12, Dec. 2023, pp. c697–c709. [www.researchgate.net/publication/376520657\\_Friendship\\_In\\_Passage\\_to\\_India\\_by\\_EM\\_Forster](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/376520657_Friendship_In_Passage_to_India_by_EM_Forster).
- [33] Piciuccio, Pier Paolo. "Ambivalent Representations of India in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*." *Journal of the Odisha Association for English Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2016, pp. 38–53. [www.academia.edu/23669057/Ambivalent\\_Representations\\_of\\_India\\_in\\_E\\_M\\_Forsters\\_A\\_Passage\\_to\\_India\\_](http://www.academia.edu/23669057/Ambivalent_Representations_of_India_in_E_M_Forsters_A_Passage_to_India_).
- [34] Parashar, Swati, and Michael Schulz. "Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial 'Selfhood' and the (Un)Doing of Africa." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 5, Apr. 2021, pp. 867–881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1903313>. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Penguin Books, 1997.
- [35] Roy, Suparna. "'That's What Careless Words do. They Make People love you a Little less': Reading Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) under Gender Theory." *International Journal of All Research Education and Scientific Methods (IJARESM)*, vol. 10, no. 12, Dec. 2022, pp. 1629–1632. [www.ijaresm.com/that-s-what-careless-words-do-they-make-people-love-you-a-little-less-reading-arundhati-roy-s-the-god-of-small-things-1997-under-gender-theory](http://www.ijaresm.com/that-s-what-careless-words-do-they-make-people-love-you-a-little-less-reading-arundhati-roy-s-the-god-of-small-things-1997-under-gender-theory).

- [36] Rafiee, Behnaz, and Reza Deedari. "A Spivakian Reading of Louise Erdrich's Track and Arundhati Roy's the God of Small Things." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, vol. 4, no. 2, Nov. 2014, pp. 134–142. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.4n.2p.134>.
- [37] Rashid, Mohd. "A Feminist Reading of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: Analyzing Gender, Power, and Resistance." *The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics*, vol. 5, no. 1, season-04 2025, pp. 144–155. [www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&drct=j&dopi=89978449&url=https://www.literaryherm.org/index.php/ojs/article/view/223&dved=2ahUKEwjHj6WeztyOAxVdyzgGHe7oKlgQFnoECB4QAQ&usq=A0vVaw19m3BpCCewje7R2-mepP18](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&drct=j&dopi=89978449&url=https://www.literaryherm.org/index.php/ojs/article/view/223&dved=2ahUKEwjHj6WeztyOAxVdyzgGHe7oKlgQFnoECB4QAQ&usq=A0vVaw19m3BpCCewje7R2-mepP18).
- [38] Sacksick, Elsa. "The Horizon in the God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy: A Poetics of Lines." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, Sept. 2010, pp. 81–91. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.8312>.
- [39] [41]. Shahparan, Mohammad. "The Cultural Conflicts on E.M. Forster a Passage to India: From Post - Colonial Perspective." *Journal of World Science*, vol. 2, no. 6, June 2023, pp. 785–797. <https://doi.org/10.58344/jws.v2i6.271>.
- [40] Unachukwu, Ogechi C., et al. "Implications of Illocutionary Speech Acts Study in Language Learning for Foreigners." *ENGLISH FRANCA Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, vol. 63, no. 7, July 2024, pp. 68–80. [www.researchgate.net/publication/377990294\\_Implications\\_of\\_Illocutionary\\_Speech\\_Acts\\_Study\\_in\\_Language\\_Learning\\_for\\_Foreigners](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/377990294_Implications_of_Illocutionary_Speech_Acts_Study_in_Language_Learning_for_Foreigners).
- [41] Vafa, Saideh Naim, and Bahman Zarrinjooee. "Orientalising India through Stereotypical Images: Edward Morgan Forster's A Passage to India." *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 7, 2024, pp. 793–799. [www.academia.edu/77625824/Orientalising\\_India\\_through\\_Stereotypical\\_Images\\_Edward\\_Morgan\\_Forster\\_s\\_A\\_Passage\\_to\\_India](http://www.academia.edu/77625824/Orientalising_India_through_Stereotypical_Images_Edward_Morgan_Forster_s_A_Passage_to_India).
- [42] Vallasek, Júlia-Réka. "From Small Things to Big Symbols. Transgressability of Borders in Arundhati Roy's Works." *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, vol. 4, no. 2, Jan. 2018, pp. 161–74. [www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=725727](http://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=725727).
- [43] Zeb, Dr. Alam, et al. "INTERSECTING CULTURES: POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH LITERATURE." *HARF-O-SUKHAN Urdu Research Journal of Pakistan*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2023, pp. 205–215. [www.researchgate.net/publication/377624893\\_INTERSECTING\\_CULTURES](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/377624893_INTERSECTING_CULTURES).