

The Politics of Age: Reading *The God of Small Things* Through Ageism

Article DOI:

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Noesis Literary Volume 3 Issue 1 (Jan-June) 2026, pp: 80-93

ISSN: 3048-4693

Abstract

Ageism has lately been recognized as another form of discrimination rooted in prejudices and social stereotypes. Like regionalism, sexism, and casteism in India, ageism has also appeared in literature portraying human society in its most nuanced and complex form. Socially defined groups based on age, like all others, are artificial. As with all identities, age-based identities are also fluid and continuously shifting. This paper examines ageism as a cultural construction that intersects with gender, caste, social status, and parentage, as reflected in the Indian postcolonial classic *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. As a modern classic, the work provides a multilayered landscape to explore different perspectives. This essay moves beyond conventional frameworks and employs the lens of ageism to explore Roy's fictional narrative. The childhood traumas experienced by Esthappen and Rahel are interpreted in this paper as age-based prejudices which create a temporal blurring between their childhood and adult experiences. Using Elizabeth Outka's concept of 'temporal mix,' this paper seeks to scrutinize the fluid boundaries between childhood and adulthood in

Estha and Rahel's lives, and how this fluidity challenges the rigid limitations imposed by ageism.

Keywords: Ageism, *The God of Small Things*, Childhood trauma, Temporal mix, Fluid Age-based identity

Introduction

Set in the small town of Kerala (Ayemenem), Arundhati Roy's 1997 novel *The God of Small Things* explores caste, gender, trauma, and social injustices that continue to be enduring themes in India's postcolonial literature. Postcolonial readings of the novel, such as Jane Poyner's "Subalternity and Scale in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*", Elleke Borhmer's "East is East: Where Postcolonialism is Neo-orientalist – The Cases of Sarojini Naidu and Arundhati Roy", and Elizabeth Outka's "Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" among others, have explored the above-mentioned themes. While the multiple gendered and caste-based power dynamics portrayed in the novel have been explored in many scholarly works, ageism is one critical lens that has so far not been used in reading it. This paper examines Roy's *The God of Small Things* through the lens of ageism. The novel offers a powerful framework to understand how age, identity and social expectations intersect, revealing the age-based hierarchies that exist in Esthappen and Rahel's society and their profound influence on power, identity, and justice.

Literature has long served to depict human society in its most authentic and complex form. A careful exploration of literature often reveals our own unnoticed virtues and vices. The presence of ageism in literature helps us understand its deep roots in collective human consciousness. Critics of ageism have argued that the elderly are most often positioned at the periphery of literary works; they are rarely the protagonists. Keshab Sigdel rightly points out:

There are organized bodies of literature about and for a specific group of the population that includes children literature, young adult literature. But there is no such body of literature that describes the unique life experiences, physical and psychological conditions, needs, and personal and social relationships of ageing people. (Sigdel 104)

In a similar tone, in *Aged by Culture* (2004), Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues that ageing narratives are limited to only two socially accepted ideas: the stories of progress and the stories of decline. She introduces the concept of “decline ideology” to examine how age is considered as a linear development towards deterioration, rather than a complex and distinct experience. She points out that the way we perceive age or ageing is a result of the “age narratives” or the stories of peril and deterioration we tell ourselves of our future aged selves (Gullette 10-13). More than a biological process, Gullette perceives age as a cultural construct that is shaped by societal expectations and media representations. She says, “In age, as in gendered and racialized constructs, relations of difference depend on the din of representations, unseen internalizations, unthinking practices, economic structures of dominance and subordination” (Gullette 27).

Ageing is an inevitable natural phenomenon that every living being undergoes. Yet, humans have developed a distinct approach to understanding growth as compared to other living beings. They prefer to organize, identify and categorize everything for better management. The process of age-based categorization is not based on rational/scientific reasoning; the development of physical and psychological functions with age is indeed genuine, and such identification is highly essential. The problem arises when age-specific features are accepted as natural, and an essentialized age-based discourse is generated and disseminated, resulting in age-based discrimination. Like sexism, this act of discriminating and distinguishing people according to their age is as old as human civilization. However, the presence of age-based differentiation in society has been acknowledged as a human prejudice and, thus, a societal problem, only lately.

Robert N. Butler was the first to use the term “Ageism” to refer to such age-based prejudices in “Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry” (1969). Butler explains that ageism emerges from “a deep-seated uneasiness” of the middle-aged group towards the younger and older age groups, as they are commonly seen as the central caretakers or contributors for the welfare of these two dependent groups (243). Like Gullette’s “decline ideology” which highlights the narrative of decline associated with ageing, Ashton Applewhite interprets ageism as a pervasive social injustice that stunts “prospects, economy and civic life” (Applewhite 13). In *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto against Ageism* (2016), Applewhite claims that ageism is the last prejudice to be acknowledged socially. Her manifesto confronts both internalized and structural ageism. She argues for a cultural shift towards age equity, considering and celebrating age as a natural and meaningful stage of life. She states, “Ageing

is not a problem to be fixed or a disease to be cured. It is a natural, powerful, and lifelong process that unites us all” (12). Like gendered and racialized injustices, ageism as a social injustice often results in trauma. In her article, “Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” (2011), Elizabeth Outka examines the temporal lingering of trauma from past to present, from one generation to another, and from one age group to another. She notes how critics have read this temporal blending in the novel as a magical realist, postcolonial or postmodern form of time play, but have missed “the central role of trauma in creating the temporal mix experienced by the characters” (21-22). She points out that the temporal mix in the novel must be read as a result of the traumatic experience of the characters. She alludes to Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s idea of “time knots” of multiple moments to explore the concept of “temporal hybridity” (22-23). Outka attributes to this temporal hybridity in Roy’s novel the quality of bearing witness to the overwhelming potential of trauma, as well as the “liberating power to disrupt existing narratives” (51, 23).

Drawing on Elizabeth Outka's concept of temporal mix, this paper analyzes the traumatic childhood experiences of Estha and Rahel in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) as a direct consequence of societal ageism. The persistent intrusion of memories from their past into their adult lives results in a temporal mix stemming from childhood traumas. It examines how the fluid boundaries between childhood and adulthood in Estha and Rahel's lives are rendered rigid by society’s essentialized stereotypes. While age-related biases subsume individuals, resistance to these social prejudices is also seen to exist. This resistance is possible through the adoption of a coping mechanism as is discussed by Joanne Lipson Freed in her “The Ethics of Identification: The Global Circulation of Traumatic Narrative in Silko’s *Ceremony* and Roy’s *The God of Small Things*”, where she focuses on the teenage characters of Silko and Roy’s works, and their mechanism of coping with childhood trauma, as well as the constant shifting of time from past to present and present to past. She argues that past is not always confined to past and says,

For Estha, one of the twin protagonists of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, the inky octopus that blots out his memories of the past can never erase one unforgettable image from his childhood, the broken body of his friend Velutha, beaten to death by the police. These literary representations of trauma, and others like them, document forms of imperial violence whose damaging effects are ongoing and cannot be confined to past. (Freed 219)

The lingering effect of the past reflects the fluid and interconnected relations among different age groups, particularly childhood and adulthood. This dismantling of rigid age binaries underscores the concept that age extends beyond the mere chronological measurement; instead, it is also a fluid and socially constructed identity that strongly resists categorization and segregation on the basis of certain commonalities or generalizations. Ageism activist Ashton Whiteapple in her Ted Talk, “Let’s End Ageism” says, “It is not having a vagina that makes life harder for women, it’s sexism. It’s not loving a man that makes life harder for gay guys - its homophobia. And it’s not the passage of time that makes getting older so much harder than it has to be - its ageism.”

Exploring the Hidden Prejudice: Ageism in the Society of *The God of Small Things*

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy depicts an adult society that is insensitive, critical and stereotypical in nature. It is a society which is inherently fragmented along numerous lines such as marital status, gender, caste and age. Here, a single mother is seen as the harbinger of ill luck, fatherless children are mistreated, a lower caste man is beaten to death, and children are made complicit in that crime through the manipulation of truth. It is a society that appears to have no empathy for children who behave differently, nor is it capable of comprehending their traumas.

In a social structure, positions such as parents, teachers, priests, police officers, and judges hold authoritative roles and consider age an implicit justification for their control. Conversely, young individuals are seen as systematically inferior or marginal to the positions of influence. Rather than the consequence of any inherent inability, this perception is due to socially constructed assumptions about maturity and different age groups. Therefore, age is seen to play a significant role in society's power dynamics. In *The God of Small Things*, we vividly see that adults have absolute authority over children’s perception of reality. One notable incident is Velutha’s death—the lower caste man with whom Ammu (Estha and Rahel’s mother), a woman of a higher caste, falls in love. Baby Kochamma, a traditional character from the Ipe family, represents the attitude of conventional society towards Ammu and Velutha. From the outset, she condemns Ammu for bringing misfortune to the family. When Estha and Rahel are found with Velutha in a distant place after going missing, Baby Kochamma accuses Velutha of kidnapping the children; she also compels Estha to support her false accusation against Velutha in front of the police. As a result, Velutha is brutally beaten to death by the police. The civil society, as well as the police’s perception of Velutha

as the ultimate criminal with no consideration for the accounts offered by Estha and Rahel, reveals the hidden prejudices and power dynamics that exist between the centre and the margins. As a lower caste man, Velutha is deemed unquestionably criminal, and as children, Estha and Rahel's explanations are disregarded in analysing the event. Thus, caste and age serve as two crucial markers for sidelining or marginalising individuals from the power structure. The same incident also exposes the politics of constructing 'truth' or 'reality'. Forced to confront the stark difference between their lived experience and the socially constructed version of reality, Estha and Rahel are left bewildered. Baby Kochamma—a spinster of the Ipe family—presents herself as an older woman committed to upholding caste and the religious and traditional norms of the family. She actively manipulates and shapes the truth, collaborating with the police to frame Velutha as the criminal and coercing Estha to lie for the sake of family reputation. In another instance, adults' authoritative power over the younger ones becomes starkly visible when Estha is sexually molested by the Lemon Drink man at the cinema hall. Fear of adult denial and public scandal prevents his traumatic experience from being shared and heard. He is left to deal with his trauma alone, while the incident is quietly buried under the facade of a respectable society.

Ageism as a critical lens cannot be used in isolation from the socio-historical context of its origin. Thus, in *The God of Small Things*, the socio-historical and cultural context created by Roy is crucial in interrogating the prevalent ageist prejudices. The novel foregrounds the age-based hierarchies that function as mechanisms of social control, legitimised by generational trauma, colonial residue, and the ideology of national progress. There is a lingering impression of colonial rule on the consciousness of the characters that people the novel. In a significant moment of the story, Chacko's ex-wife, Margaret Kochamma, and their daughter, Sophie Mol, come to India from England. The excitement of the Ipe family is doubled by their pride in welcoming guests from England; especially the restless enthusiasm of Baby Kochamma becomes ironic. She is hostile towards Ammu for being a divorced woman and believes that Ammu has "no position anywhere at all" (45). On the other hand, she expresses unconditional love and respect towards Chacko's divorced wife, Margaret Kochamma. The efforts taken by the family to welcome their relatives from England, whom they perceive as representatives of the "superior" Western culture, reveal the underlying inferiority complex harboured by erstwhile colonial subjects.

Social prejudices are always embedded in a complex web of multiple factors, and never operate alone. Estha, Rahel, and Sophie Mol, despite being cousins and of about the

same age, have different experiences in the family. Since Sophie Mol hails from England, she is perceived as superior to Rahel and Estha, and it becomes their primary duty to impress her in every way possible. Estha and Rahel, innocent children, are made to believe they lack something that Sophie Mol possesses. They are forced to behave generously and speak in English to her, thus reflecting the cultural anxiety of the Ipe family and the society they are part of. The adult world of Ayemenem strongly believes their culture to be inferior to Western culture and mimics Western practices. Estha and Rahel, already vulnerable to the adult world, become doubly victimized in this cultural collision. Previously condemned for being children of a single parent, with Sophie Mol's arrival, they become double victims of social prejudices. They are compelled to write and speak in English by Baby Kochamma and are constantly haunted by the question, "What will Sophie Mol think?" as they are subtly positioned to entertain Sophie Mol. A powerful discourse of discrimination is generated as ageism becomes entangled with various underlying social prejudices. The above instance illustrates the colonial mentality, white supremacy, and age-linked authority that underpin such prejudices.

Ageist Prejudices and Traumatized Childhood

The first instance when Estha and Rahel are compelled to accept something invalid as truth is when Velutha dies in police custody, and it is covered up. This incident fosters a sense of confusion and doubt in the children about their understanding of the world. While the brutality with which Velutha is treated traumatizes them, the deception alienates them from a world where truth is manipulated through language and power. It demonstrates how power operates not only through violence but also via the systematic exploitation of those at the margins of society. It also reveals to them that due to their young age, they are largely marginalized, and their voices, even if they were speaking the truth, do not matter. In the previous instance, Baby Kochamma's demand that Estha and Rahel behave more maturely with Sophie Mol displaces the twins from childhood to adulthood in a complex cultural setting. Such inherent prejudices of the adult world reflect the hollowness of their value system. In one instance, Roy exposes the hypocrisy of the adult world when Chacko, by virtue of being a man, claims the right over Mammachi's factory. Mammachi, the oldest person in the family and respected by all due to her age, is the one who runs the pickle factory. But neither her age nor her worth is capable of confronting gender politics. However, for Estha and Rahel, twins of a divorced mother, ageist prejudices are powerful enough to traumatize their childhoods.

In general, age is considered a chronological progression of biological development. The identification of age groups is not limited to their physiological attributes. As mentioned earlier, ageist theorists and activists like Gullette and Applewhite have shown that age identity contains cultural connotations. Apart from the chronological development, each age group carries a socially constructed identity, which may often be essentialized. This socio-cultural identity develops with the interplay of power, discourse and representation. Similar to other cultural identities such as race, gender, and class, age is also a marker of identification through which individuals are positioned, perceived and politicized within a cultural unit. In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), authors Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman argue that what we perceive as reality is not a static or fixed pre-existing entity but an illusion of reality that has been actively created and propagated through social interaction and shared meaning. Similarly, in *Truth and Power* (1980), Michel Foucault argues that what society perceives as ‘truth’ is not universal but constructed through cultural discourse and authoritarian power. Social practices and cultural discourse work hand in hand to enhance the production of meaning and establish normative behaviour. The socio-cultural construction of age determines certain behavioural practices as appropriate and normative, and expects everyone to follow them. As a result of such generalization, subjective experiences of life are sidelined, and individuals are bound by an artificial, predetermined age role. In the novel, the village of Ayemenem and the Ipe family, especially Baby Kochamma, expect the twins Estha and Rahel to perform those age roles.

A 1988 study by Zebrowitz–McArthur showed that young people are perceived as more energetic and youthful. Society often views young people as robust, rebellious, the angry teen, the perfectionist, and many others. In popular imagination, teenagers are frequently depicted as reckless and rebellious; for example, fictional characters like James Dean in the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). However, beyond the spotlight, there are those lives that do not fit these expectations. Estha and Rahel challenge stereotypical norms of being young adults. Estha is presented as a silent child – a symbol of trauma and societal youth; a self-contained person who is hardly seen interacting with other people around him. The narrator describes him as a person who has “acquired the ability to blend into the background of wherever he was... to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eyes...occupy(ing) very little space in the world” (Roy 10-11). His gradual quieting, unnoticed by those around him, is not just psychological but systematic; society offers no space for articulating a child’s trauma. His submissive existence exemplifies that of young

adults who are isolated and alienated from life and society in complete ignorance. Roy skillfully presents the background of their alienated transition from youth to adulthood. Estha and Rahel undergo the dysfunctional married life of their parents and their separation, the death of their single mother, the death of their cousin Sophie Mol, and the cruelty of conventional society. All these events shape Estha and Rahel into isolated shells of themselves. The society appears to them to be bewildering, insensitive, and detached. Rahel had no friends at school and was never invited to fancy parties since she appeared to be careless and aimless. The attitudes of her teachers towards her “bizarre, impractical building plans, presented on cheap brown paper, (and) her indifference to their passionate critiques”—demonstrate both society’s inability to understand her, and Rahel’s failure to meet the expectations of a conventional society (Roy 18). Without essential care and guidance from their parents or family, individuals like Rahel and Estha live their lives like unanchored boats.

Subversion As a Response to Ageism

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler defines gender role/identity as an action of repetitive performance, which posits identity as a performed rather than an inherent attribute. Butler’s theory is useful in reading age identity. Like gender role/identity, age role is also performed through certain conditioned use of language, dress, posture, interaction and behaviour. This conditioned performance gives birth to ageist stereotypes, which determine how people of different ages should behave. One must however, remember that like gender attributes, ageist attributes too are not inherent but a performed act; and similar to gender performance, there are bound to be subversions. Ageist attributes can be observed shifting from one age group to another naturally, demonstrating what Homi Bhabha refers to as the ‘third space’ even within the domain of ageist performance. In the context of cultural hybridity, Bhabha describes this space as a liminal or in-between state where boundaries overlap through cultural interactions. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), he characterizes it as a site of negotiation where the myth of a fixed identity is debunked, and hybridized identity becomes the real, ongoing reality. He further describes this space as ambivalent and productive, where new meanings are constantly generated, and alternative identities emerge. Bhabha’s concept of the liminal space can thus be employed to interpret the fluidity of age boundaries and to understand how there is no fixed point from which an individual transitions from youth to adulthood. This seamless transition occurs within an in-between space where social expectations, lived experiences, norms, and self-perceptions are entangled and in constant play. Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction explains that no binary groups exist

independently and are instead dependent on their binary opposites. There is a continuous flux involving a back-and-forth movement, creating ruptures in the rigidity of binary groups. Socio-cultural perceptions of age uphold certain binary distinctions such as young/old, childhood/adulthood, dependency/autonomy, and productivity/sterility. However, based on Derrida's theory, we can say that these binaries are not fixed and are often challenged by individual life experiences. Adolescents may appear and behave too mature for their age, and adults may exhibit childlike traits, thus blurring the boundaries between the socially demarcated age groups. This rupture of binary expectations versus lived reality occurs within the third space, where chronological age intersects with psychological, emotional, cultural, and social normative constructions.

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), Erving Goffman discusses how individuals experience stigma when they discover their attributes, mannerisms and behaviours are deemed unfit or undesirable by society. This social disqualification often leads to rejection of one's social identity. Goffman further explains that individuals employ certain coping mechanisms, such as concealment, passing and adjusting to social interactions to deal with the negative impact of stigma. Goffman's theory of stigma can be employed to study the characters in Roy's fictional world. We see numerous instances where characters challenge traditional age expectations and engage in a process of deferral, where their age attributes are not confined to rigid categories. Estha's highly detached and submissive adulthood does not manifest the ageist expectations of his society. Society always perceives an adult man to be energetic, robust and vigorous. His silent subversion of that belief makes him a madman in the eyes of society. His aunt, Baby Kochamma, believes that he has lost his mind because he does not interact with them. Estha's silence may be read by using Goffman's concept of 'concealment' which involves the act of hiding or minimizing their stigmatized attributes to avoid the negative remarks and rejection of society. Estha attempts to camouflage himself from the eye of the stereotypical society. His twin sister Rahel seems to follow the act of 'passing' by trying to blend herself with society as a 'normal' person. Unlike Estha, despite her social stigmatization, she goes to college, gets married and experiences life beyond her isolated shell. Rahel responds both silently and rebelliously; she silently refuses to perform her age role and carries a free spirit of her own; she takes the advantage of being disqualified from social norms and tries to live with her "disoriented" self. She joins college and quits; she marries a Western man by denying her cultural bond,

and also gets divorced. She is a silent free bird, who does not allow social stigma to prohibit her from experiencing life on her own terms.

Baby Kochamma's remark about Estha's personality reflects her ageist prejudice. For her, Estha's refusal to perform his age is unacceptable. She swiftly labels him as someone who is not in his right mind solely because he does not interact with others or conform to the ageist expectations of an adult man. Estha, having endured several traumatic experiences since childhood, finds the outside world cold-hearted, hopeless, and disappointing. He chooses solitude over attempting to meet the expectations of society, thus challenging the traditional expectation of a man his age being energetic, robust, and productive. Estha subverts the conventional expectations of his age role and responds to life in his own individual way. However, unlike Estha, Rahel does not exhibit the same behavioural traits despite sharing his traumatic experience. Each deals with his/her trauma differently. Rahel optimistically goes through all the phases of her life from college to unconventional marriage, followed by divorce and eventual return to Ayemenem. Society perceives her as leading a "disorienting," careless, and aimless life, little understanding that it was her response to the traumatic experiences she had to face in a biased society.

Conclusion: From Stereotypes to Solidarity

The God of Small Things tells us the story of two individuals who share the same traumatic background but who develop into distinct personalities. This underscores the fact that broad generalizations about age attributes are flawed as they cannot guarantee uniform behaviour across all members of an age group. Instead, they reveal the enforced and stereotypical patterns assigned to age groups. As Roy metaphorically notes, there is always "an ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency" in the classification of Paradise Pickles (30). She vehemently opposes any rigidity in social structure and further states that,

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

Estha's indifferent attitude towards life sets him apart from his conventional age role as a robust youth in his prime; instead, "he began to look wiser than he really was. Like a fisherman in a city. With sea secrets in him" (13). He trespasses on his adult identity and enters into a silent, graver and wiser personality which is traditionally attributed to elderly people. In another section, the adult Estha is described as a person who carries "inside him the memory of a young man with an old man's mouth" (32). Thus, Estha epitomizes the fluidity of ageist attitudes. Roy demonstrates a third space where two different cultures collide. The confrontation between the Eastern and Western cultures creates a liminal space where a new set of marginalized groups emerge. It is from this liminal space that Estha and Rahel subvert the expectations of an ageist society. This is a space where socially demarcated boundaries of childhood and adulthood become fluid and constantly shift.

In her TED Talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observes that "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Stereotypes are the product of assumptions and observation-based remarks made by the dominant group in a society. Each individual in society constantly internalizes these stereotypes within their physical and mental behaviour, and consequently, they are normalized. According to the theory of 'Stereotype Embodiment', these stereotypes continuously invade the mind whenever the behaviour, physiological or psychological traits of the person match the stereotypes. Stereotypes are not always negative; there are positive stereotypes as well. For instance, older people are generally believed to be wiser, gentler, patient and loving. Such age-related stereotypes harm none. However, simultaneously, there are negative stereotypes that are deeply embedded in the collective human psyche and affect the individual as well as their surroundings. Because when a person becomes ageist, he not only discriminates against others, but he is affected by his own internalized stereotypes. The stereotypes are part of cultural discourse production. Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and truth provides a critical framework for understanding the production of stereotypes. In "Truth and Power" (1980), he asserts that 'truth' is not universal but socially constructed through cultural discourse and mechanisms of power. Stereotypes represent Foucault's idea of 'regime of truth' which is a socially sanctioned belief that serves to carry the hierarchical structure. It is a socially sanctioned way of looking and speaking about particular groups such as children, adults and the elderly. In literary narratives, ageist stereotypes such as "rebellious teen", "quiet adult", "naïve child", "robust youth", "delicate female" etc., function as discursive tools which define and confine a

character's identity and individual agency. Roy provides a literary space of solidarity, where the reader can empathize with the marginalized voices. She pushes the reader from their own familiar spaces, towards an open field of humanity, where identities are fluid; childhood and adulthood are not opposites but overlapping experiences constructed through personal history and socio-cultural norms.

While this essay has explored Estha and Rahel's "temporal-mix" induced by trauma, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma's predicaments, with their identities marginalized by the age-based hierarchy of their society, are worth exploring. It would be worthwhile to examine how they navigate their circumstances, defined by the rigid binaries of productivity and sterility, by using Gullette's "decline ideology". This examination of Roy's novel opens up new avenues of inquiry in contemporary South Asian literature in general, and postcolonial Indian literature in particular through the lens of ageism. A comparative study could help examine the subversion of ageist stereotypes, like the ones adopted by Estha and Rahel, as constituting a broader post-structuralist trend in representing the subaltern. The understanding of age as a fluid and culturally constructed identity could be further used to study the intersectionality of ageism, gender and class or caste in Indian literature.

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