

# Role of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in Indigenous Communicative Contexts: A Study of *The God of Small Things*

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## Abstract

Communicative strategies like code-switching and code-mixing have interested researchers the world over. These strategies have traversed from real life situations to creative writings to social networking domains and are dominant in bilingual or multi-lingual societies for multifarious reasons. While majority of the research was conducted in the spoken form from the real-life contexts, a few were directed towards the written forms in literary genres and computer-mediated communication. However, a significant gap becomes noticeable and needs to be explored in Indian English fiction where creative writers have dexterously used these communicative strategies. Keeping the above in mind, the present paper attempts to analyze the role of these strategies in indigenous interpersonal communicative contexts in Indian English fiction. The text chosen for this purpose is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and the analysis is based on the grammatical and pragmatic explanation of indigenous words which mostly belong to the area of interpersonal communication. The study shows how the author has skillfully used these strategies to unravel the indigenous cultural and social customs and mindset of the people within a particular indigenous community as well as the role-relationship between the interlocutors in a particular communicative context.

Keywords: Code-switching, code-mixing, code-retention, interpersonal communicative context, pragmatic markers.

## Introduction

'Language is what member of a particular society speaks' (Wardhaugh, 2006). This is what makes language indigenous or native to a particular community or society. But when people of one community interact with members of another community exchange of lexical items takes place. This gives to rise to the pervasive social phenomena of code-switching and code-mixing which is observed in most bilingual and multilingual societies. 'Code-switching' occurs quite frequently in an informal conversation among people who share and are familiar with their educational, ethnic and socio-economic background (Hoffman, 1991); while 'code-mixing' refers to all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence (Muysken, 2000). This trend is especially noticeable in countries like India, where one finds a myriad of languages and dialects. In India, code-switching and code-mixing take place not only between the Indian or native languages but also between the Indian languages and English. From casual

conversations and social networking domains to creative writings, this drift has permeated all spheres. The Indian English writers also have used these social phenomena in their writings to make their works appear more authentic because though the written medium is English, the characters, their conversations and the locale are indigenous. Therefore, Mukherjee & Chakraborty (2012) have asserted that

“In the texts, instead of code-switching, we would prefer using the term ‘code-retaining’. This is because of the fact that IWE have been of late treated as translations of Indian content into English language. Hence, instead of saying that the characters switched over to the native languages, we can say that the writers have retained the original languages in the appropriate contexts” (pp. 38-39). Taking this cue, the present paper intends to analyze the role of code-switching and code-mixing in indigenous interpersonal communicative contexts in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (GST).

### **Review of Literature**

Code-switching and code-mixing as useful communicative tools have interested researchers for a long time. The spoken form of these devices in informal and formal contexts was mostly focused upon since the seventies. Studies of the grammatical aspects of code-switching were carried out in which the points in discourse or sentence were focused upon where the switching-over took place and on how the speakers did it (Gingras, 1974; Hasselmo, 1972; Pfaff, 1976, 1979; Poplack, 1980; Sankoff & Poplack, 1980; Timm, 1975). Studies were also conducted on spoken language mixing (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Auer, 1999; Li Wei, 1998, 2005) and written language mixing in literary genres (Schmeling & Schmitz-Emans, 2002; Knauth, 2007). Hudson (1980) differentiated between code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing and asserted that code-switching was ‘the inevitable consequence of bilingualism’. On the other hand, Preston (1989) considered code-switching to be a “language shift to meet social demands”. Gardner-Chloros and Weston (2005) focused on the differences and similarities between the functions of code-switching in spoken and written forms. Müller (2015) opined that though the stylistic function of code-switching played a major role in the literature on a micro-level, yet on the macro-level that kind of code-switching could be considered to be a response to bilingual identity. Many aspects of code-switching and code-mixing between Hindi and English have also been studied (Chetia, 2017; Sailaja, 2011). Chetia (2017) observed that in a multilingual country like India, code-mixing and code-switching have become a norm rather than a deviation. Studies have also been carried out in the fields of advertisements, TV shows, and Bollywood movies (Kathpalia, 2015; Herring, 2003; Mónica, 2009; Sailaja, 2011).

### **Objective and Methodology**

The review of the literature shows that extensive research has been done in code-switching and code-mixing in almost all genres and contexts. They have been explored in Indian English fiction as well though a close and in-depth analysis of these communicative tools is yet to be conducted. The current paper thus aims to analyze the role of code-switching and code-mixing in indigenous interpersonal communicative contexts in Indian English fiction. The novel chosen for study is Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (2002). This novel has been examined by researchers from different perspectives like the postmodern narrative techniques and its functionality in *The God of Small Things* (Hariharasudan & Thavabalan, 2018); Roy’s manifestation of multifarious and

simultaneous influence of politics in the context of history and its effects on the marginalized (Sarker & Rahman, 2018); Arundhati Roy's capability to portray borders and create borderland in her novel (Simon, 2017); elements of feminism like the plight of women and the consequences of a fight for justice (Sheeba, 2017); Roy's use of linguistic innovations (Chaudhury, 2013); Roy's protest against social stratification (Aisyah, 2008); how Arundhati Roy used language psychologically, typographically, structurally and culturally in *The God of Small Things* (Stockdale, 2008); and the presence of stylistic features and the relationship between style and literary aesthetics (Chan Monica, 2007). Thus, though exploration has been done from various angles, yet exhaustive scrutiny of the role of code-switching and code-mixing in the context of interpersonal communication remains unexplored. This has given us the scope for exploring the novel pragmatically. The novel has also been chosen for further vital reasons – the entire setting of the novel is rural Kerala that gives us an insight of a typical indigenous Malayalee community; the existence of an indigenous language Malayalam; and the presence of native and cultural variants in the novel allows us to validate our linguistic claim in a wider milieu. The characters or interlocutors mostly communicate in Malayalam and English. Therefore, the analysis would be based on the grammatical and pragmatic explanation of indigenous Malayalam words mostly belonging to the area of interpersonal communication.

However, here two key terms particularly relevant to our analysis needs explanation. First, 'interpersonal communicative context' that refers to a particular context or situation in which two or more interlocutors communicate with each other with the help of verbal or non-verbal messages. Second, 'pragmatic markers' are linguistic items that perform diverse functions in communicative contexts. These markers take 'emotive meaning', which relate to meaning that emerges in conversations. These words or linguistic items do not just convey propositional/lexical meaning but help to bring out the meaning in the conversation/context. The contextual details which these 'pragmatic markers' encapsulate are the relationship between the participants, the socio-cultural background of the characters, the nature (formal/informal) of communicative situations, and the domain of interaction. These markers have been retained at appropriate places by the writer under study that serves as clues to contextual details in interpersonal communicative situations.

### **Analysis of the data**

The data from the novel have been categorized and analyzed under two sub-heads – code-switching and code-mixing.

#### **Code-switching**

i. 'Velutha! *Ividay!* Velutha!' And she too had veins in her neck. (GST, 71)

The speaker here is a little girl, Rahel, addressing her favourite friend, Velutha, who is seen marching with a flag. Rahel tries to draw the attention of Velutha by calling out.

The Malayalam word '*ividay*' means 'here'. Its purpose is related to calling one's attention. The pragmatic information of the context it carries includes the existence of familiarity between the interlocutors and the social rank of the speaker. In Indian society, the young cannot address the older ones by their names unless there exists a strong affectionate bond between the two and the young are socially more influential (in status or economically) than the older ones. In the

instance, one can find that though the speaker is younger to the addressee, she belongs to the higher class and therefore addresses the addressee by his name. It can be assumed that the bond between the two is close (friendly) and that the power factor and dependency gives the speaker the liberty to address the receiver by his name.

ii. 'Ay! *Eda cherukka!*' the OrangedrinkLemondrink Man said, in a gravelley voice thick with sleep. 'What the hell d'you think you're doing?' (GST, 101)

The speaker here is a seller in the Abhilash Talkies who sat in the Refreshments Counter selling cold drinks and the addressee is Estha, one of the twins of Ammu Ipe, who belongs to the higher rank. The cold-drink vendor awoke due to Estha's loud singing in the lobby.

In Malayalam, 'Ay' is an interjection and 'eda' is an address-term used for a male who is younger than the speaker. *Cherukka* refers to 'a little boy'. It is used during informal speech. The whole statement shows that the speaker belongs to a lower social rank and therefore addresses Estha in his usual way. The 'gravelley voice' further indicates that the speaker belongs to a subordinate rank and is a bucolic and does not possess the refined tone like the urbanites. It further shows that in Indian society, the mode of addressing a person reveals the social status of the speaker and this becomes more prominent when the speaker addresses someone younger to him/her. This also shows a lack of acquaintance between the two. It can be inferred that there exists no bond between the two (they are strangers) and that though the speaker is socially not powerful as the addressee, yet he exerts his social/power control over the receiver because of his age.

iii. 'Aiyyo, Rahel Mol!' Comrade K.N.M. Pillai said, recognizing her instantly. 'Orkunnilley? Comrade Uncle?' (GST, 128)

The speaker here is Comrade Pillai and the addressee is Rahel, the twin-sister of Estha. The interlocutors share the same social status. The Comrade begins the conversation with the latter whom he meets after a long time.

*Aiyyo* is an interjection in Malayalam that is used in diverse situations and serves various purposes. Here it has been used as a discourse initiator and also to convey astonishment. The word is used only in informal contexts. *Mol* refers to 'a little girl'. Amongst the Keralites, it is traditional to use *Mol* along with the first names to address little girls. Here though Rahel is no more a little girl, yet the speaker addresses her as *mol* because for him she has remained the same. *Orkunnilley* means 'Don't you remember?' Since the two interlocutors are meeting after a long time, the speaker seeks recognition from the addressee. This is obvious from the usage of interrogation marks successively one after the other in Malayalam and English. He is eager to begin a conversation with Rahel but he wanted to verify first whether she remembered him as well or not. The speaker is also trying to unveil his closeness to the addressee by using the native expression. The indigenous words in the paradigm reveals the relationship between the interlocutors which is familiar yet distant and the informal communicative situation. The dialogue also infers to the social power/dominance of the speaker. It also brings out though subtly, the cultural norm prevalent in a particular Malayalam community.

iv. 'Oower, oower, oower. In Amayrica now, isn't it?' It wasn't a question. (GST, 129)

The speaker here is a man who is known to Comrade Pillai and the addressees are Rahel and Pillai. It is a familiar situation in which the Comrade introduces Rahel to the speaker.

'Oower' is an affirmation marker in Malayalam which means 'yes'. The speaker here tries to recall Rahel's grandfather and when he remembers, he replies in the affirmative. The use of the

indigenous word and its replication shows the speaker's indigenous communicative style. Here the way the word America is spelt, i.e., 'Amayrica' refers to the way the word is pronounced by the natives. The use of the question tag 'isn't it?' also shows the indigenous communicative style. In Indian English and most Indian languages, the speaker attaches a question-tag at the end of a sentence and expects a positive reply. Here 'isn't it?' is one such tag where the response expected is 'yes' and not in the negative. The author also states that it wasn't a question but pure appreciation. The example strengthens our conjecture that instantaneous expressions are habitually in the native language.

v. '*Aiyyopaavam*,' Comrade Pillai whispered, and his nipples drooped in mock dismay. 'Poor fellow.' (GST, 131)

The speaker here is Comrade Pillai and the addressee is Rahel. Here the former is referring to Estha, the latter's twin brother.

As discussed earlier, *Aiyyo* is an interjection in Malayalam and *paavam* means 'poor chap'. Here the Comrade shows his empathy for Estha, who had stopped talking and instead preferred walking. Here *aiyyo* is used for showing compassion for someone, and this feeling of sympathy is emphasized by the word being repeated in the translation 'poor fellow'. Interjections are always impulsive and indicate the immediate feelings of the speaker. Hence it is expressed in the indigenous language. But here the feeling of sympathy is a false one as is evident from the statement '...and his nipples drooped in mock dismay'. The nipples of the speaker contradicted whatever proclamation he made. Further, the speaker 'whispered', which shows that he sought secrecy and didn't want to be overheard, although there was no one nearby. This indicates that the feelings of the speaker towards Estha and Rahel were not at all genuine. If it were otherwise, Pillai wouldn't have whispered nor would his body language oppose his speech. Thus, the native expression here represents the intention of the speaker, his relationship with the addressee and also the situation in which the conversation takes place.

vi. '*Kando*, Kochu Mariye?' Mammachi said. 'Can you see our Sophie Mol?' '*Kandoo*, Kochamma,' Kochu Maria said extra loud. 'I can see her.' (GST, 178-9)

Here the conversation takes place between Mammachi and her cook, Kochu Maria. Mammachi was almost blind and therefore couldn't see her granddaughter, Sophie, and so she asks the latter if she could see Sophie.

*Kando* implies 'Did you see?' Here Mammachi asks whether Kochu Mariya has seen Sophie or not. The name Maria has been changed to 'Mariye' to give it a local accent. *Mol* has been added to Sophie to indicate the proximity the speaker shares with the little girl. It is an address term that is used endearingly. *Kandoo* denotes 'I saw'. Kochu Maria replies that she has seen Sophie. *Kochamma* is an address-term in Malayalam that is used to address women and sometimes it substitutes the original name of a woman. For instance, in the text, there is a character called Baby Kochamma whose real name was Navomi Ipe but everyone called her Baby Kochamma instead. The preservation of the Malayalam address-terms in the conversation illustrates the close relationship between the interlocutors and the indigenous communication style. Thus the identity of a typical indigenous context is represented here.

vii. '*Aiyyo kashtam*,' Velutha said. 'Would I do that? You tell me, would Velutha ever do that? It must've been my Long-lost Twin brother.' (GST, 177)

Here the interlocutors are Velutha and Rahel. Velutha tries to persuade her that it was not he that she had seen in the demonstration but his twin.

The interjection 'Ayyo' has been used here as a discourse-initiator to express sorrow. 'Kashtam' means 'sad' or 'sorrow'. The whole phrase means 'oh how sad' or 'how sorrowful'. It highlights the informal context and the familiarity between the interlocutors. The spontaneity and the feelings of the speaker become clear from the use of the native expressions. Both the apparent and hidden intentions of the speaker are exposed here. The speaker doesn't want Rahel to know the truth because if she finds out it was he who was there in the demonstration and yet had not heeded to her shouts, she would feel hurt. He is also afraid that if she finds out the truth about Velutha's connection with the Naxalites, she might disclose it to her family. So, through the combination of the pragmatic markers and the native words, the conversation sounds authentic to the context. The familiarity that exists between the interlocutors is further confirmed by Velutha's asking Rahel 'you tell me, would Velutha ever do that?' and tries to divert her by concocting a story.

viii. '*Kushumbi*,' Kochu Maria said. 'Jealous people go straight to hell.' (GST, 185)

The speaker here is Kochu Maria and the receiver is Rahel. Here Kochu Maria is offering Rahel a piece of cake prepared in honour of her cousin, Sophie and when she refuses to take it, the former calls her jealous.

*Kushumbi* means a 'jealous girl'. The single term 'kushumbi' here also indicates the amount of negative feeling with which it is articulated. Here Kochu Maria is calling Rahel jealous – jealous of Sophie. The novelist has used an English equivalent of the Malayalam word to broaden the impact of the original expression. The personal views of the speaker comes out in the native language. Further, the speaker already knows the reason of Rahel's envy and tries to frighten her by narrating the repercussions of jealousy. Thus, one can find how the native word has been used to indicate the intent of the speaker, and that is the reason why we treat the word not as a single lexical item but as an expression. Also, the interlocutors are familiar to each other but not close and the speaker is more dominating because she's older than the addressee.

ix. '*Ayyo, Mon! Mol!* What must you be thinking? That Kuttappen's a basket case!' an embarrassed, disembodied voice said. (GST, 208)

The speaker here is Kuttappen, Velutha's older brother, and the addressees are Rahel and Estha. The twins had gone to Velutha's house to get their boat repaired and found Velutha's older brother lying on the floor.

*Ayyo* here is similar to 'hey' which is used as a discourse-initiator. It serves the purpose of showing proximity and informality between the interlocutors. The Malayalam words *Mon* and *Mol* mean 'little boy' and 'little girl' respectively. *Ayyo* indicates the style of initiating conversation with little children. Both the children are addressed separately. The speaker is a paralytic patient who could not get up and therefore greets them in his usual way. The intimacy between the interlocutors and the feelings of the speaker is revealed through the native expression. Kuttappen knew the children well because his family had served them for years now. The voice of the speaker appeared discomfited because he did not expect the children to see him in that helpless condition. It also appeared incorporeal or ghostly because the room where Kuttappen lay was dark and the children had entered the room unexpectedly and did not notice Kuttappen lying on the floor. The expression of suddenness or unexpectedness is deftly brought about by the use of the native discourse-initiator, *Ayyo*.

- x. '*Orukaaryamparayathey?*' Comrade Pillai switched to Malayalam and a confiding, conspiratorial voice. 'I'm speaking as a friend, *keto*. Off the record.' (GST, 277)

The speaker is Comrade Pillai and the addressee is Chacko. Here they are talking about Velutha, a Paravan and a Communist party-worker.

In Malayalam, '*Oru kaaryam parayathey?*' means 'Can I tell you one thing?' and '*Keto*' means 'did you hear?' Here the Comrade is trying to befriend Chacko and suggests the latter regarding how Velutha should be treated. Both of them are a bit cautious about Velutha, each in his way. The speaker's switching over from English to Malayalam here truly corresponds with the speech act that he is engaged in. It can be observed that whenever some private conversation takes place people prefer the native language, which comes to them naturally. The speaker's speaking in a confiding, conspiratorial voice indicates that he has a wicked intention in his mind that would put both Chacko and Velutha into danger. He also expects Chacko to keep the conversation secret. He seems to seek permission from Chacko in Malayalam but he knew that Chacko was bound to listen to whatever Pillai had to offer. Thus, the conversation shows that though the interlocutors are familiar to each other yet they are not close, and the speaker appears to be more dominating than the addressee.

- xi. He turned to her with an affectionate, naughty smile. '*Allay edi, Kalyani?*' (GST, 278)

Here the speaker is Comrade Pillai and the addressee is Kalyani, his wife. The Comrade tells Chacko that his wife would never allow the Paravans inside their house, as she was the boss of his home and then asks his wife for her substantiation.

'*Allay*' can be treated as a particle in Malayalam and here it adds a friendly and endearing tone to the literal meaning 'isn't it?' or 'isn't that so?' 'Edi' is an address-term in Malayalam used for a woman who is close to the speaker and younger to him by age. Here the speaker uses the native term '*allay edi*' to ask confirmation from his wife and the reply expected is, of course, a positive one. Here the author has retained the entire utterance in Malayalam and has not provided the English equivalent to maintain the indigenous flavour but still, the contextual proposition is intelligible to the readers. It also shows the intimacy that exists between the interlocutors, which is further established by the speaker's turning to her with 'an affectionate, naughty smile'. The 'affectionate and naughty smile' indicates two things. First, the affectionate smile reveals the fondness of the speaker towards his wife and also shows the importance and love he bestowed to his wife, quite in contrast to the conjugal life that Chacko enjoyed. Second, the naughty smile shows that the speaker was in a teasing mood. He very well knew that he was the boss of the house but he deliberately tells Chacko that Kalyani, his wife, was the boss who would never allow an untouchable to enter their house.

### Code mixing

- i. Thanks *keto*!' he said. '*Valarey* thanks!' (GST, 70)

Here Chacko is thanking an unknown demonstrator in the crowd who happened to shut the bonnet of his car.

'*Keto*', in this context, roughly means 'Did you hear?' and '*valarey*' means 'a lot of'. Here instead of uttering the whole thing in English, the speaker mixes some Malayalam words in between. *Keto* again, though a single word, seems to be a complete expression communicating the

speaker's gratefulness to the addressee which is reaffirmed by the following expression 'valarey thanks'. This has been done to add validity to the English words. In India, most of the time when the thanksgiving is done in English, a native specifier is added to the English word to make it ingenuous. The speaker is also trying to attract the attention of the addressee and express his (former's) gratitude. It is quite evident from the conversation that both the interlocutors are unfamiliar to each other and the former is trying his best to show his gratitude to the latter. This is evident from the use of the word 'thanks' twice and also the native word '*keto*'. Moreover, the exclamation marks used at the end of the sentences indicate gratitude (on being helped) and the urgency of the speaker to express his feelings.

ii. 'Chacko *saar*. Our factory *Modalali*.' (GST, 271)

Here the speaker is Mrs Pillai, Comrade Pillai's wife and the addressee is Latha, Comrade Pillai's niece. The speaker is introducing Chacko to her niece.

Here '*saar*' is the indigenized form of 'sir' and '*modalali*' means 'landlord' in Malayalam. The addition of the word 'factory' to *modalali* indicates 'ownership'. A speaker uses '*saar*' only when the addressee is socially or economically higher than the speaker. The term '*modalali*' confirms the former view. It indicates that the person is higher in status not only socially and economically but he also belongs to a distinctive position professionally too. The speaker competently replaces a formal professional term by its local equivalent to add spontaneity to the situation. Chacko enjoyed a higher position socially both because he was an Oxford graduate and also the proprietor of a Pickle and Jam factory. The speaker takes pride in introducing him to her niece and it also shows the respect (attitude) of the speaker towards Chacko. The analysis shows the familiar relationship between the interlocutors and also the person who is being referred to and the power factor which plays a significant role in the indigenous context since in India educated people with the high social and economic positions are revered.

iii. 'What about *Modalali Mariakutty*?' someone suggested with a giggle. (GST, 80)

Here the speaker is one of the marchers in the demonstration of workers and the addressee is Baby Kochamma. One of the marchers enquired about Baby Kochamma's name and when she didn't answer, another co-marcher suggested a name, '*Modalali Mariakutty*'.

*Modalali* here means landlord (in this case, a landlady) and '*kutty*' is a suffix added to the first name of girls and this form of address is quite common in Kerala. Since Baby Kochamma was seated in a car, she was assumed to be from a rich family and so the marchers who were mostly workers tried to make fun of her. This shows the contempt of the poor for the rich in the Indian society and more particularly the contempt of the Naxalites for the landlords. Here again, instead of using the English equivalents, the author has kept the original native words intact to reveal the intent of the speaker and to make the context appear more genuine. The use of the indigenous address-term indicates the social rank of the addressee and also captures the note of irony in the speaker's voice which is confirmed by the following statement in English 'someone suggested with a giggle.' Here, one might notice another implication of the word '*modalali*'. In the previous instance, the indigenous term '*modalali*' was used in a positive sense to show respect towards a person of higher status and power but in this example, the same term is used in a negative (or ironical) sense, i.e., to make fun of Baby Kochamma. This is further confirmed by the speaker's giggle. The analysis shows that the interlocutors here are strangers and power factor plays a negative role here; i.e., the people of higher social rank are scorned at by the lower ones in a particular communicative context.

iv. 'I don't know about that, but she's very beautiful,' Kochu Maria shouted. '*Sundarikutty*. She's a little angel.' (GST, 179)

Here the speaker is Kochu Maria and the addressee is Mammachi and they are talking about Sophie Mol.

*Sundarikutty* means 'a beautiful girl'. Kochu Maria is addressing Sophie as '*sundarikutty*'. The author has used an English equivalent 'a little angel' of the Malayalam word to indicate the additional semantic association that the original word carries. It also indicates the positive intent of the speaker. She wants to make it clear to Mammachi who is almost blind that her (latter's) granddaughter is beautiful and this is exactly what the latter wishes to hear. Thus the indigenous expression '*Sundarikutty*' here can be treated as an expression of admiration.

### Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of the data in the previous section shows how through code-mixing and code-switching in the speech of the characters, the author has succeeded in representing the contextual details of interpersonal communicative situations of the Malayalam community. The contextual details captured in the analysis relate to the relationship between the interlocutors in terms of their familiarity with each other and their closeness or distance in sharing and experiencing communicative events. The social and economic status of the characters in society is also reflected through the occurrence of native address-terms, discourse markers and other pragmatic markers at appropriate places in the conversations of the characters. In many conversations, the indigenous terms are dexterously juxtaposed with minute details of non-verbal communication like the speaker's voice contour, his/her tone indicating their communicative intent and other emotive gestures. The study also shows how code-mixing and code-switching can be used in Indian English fiction to personify the identity of the characters in terms of their age, class, and social/economic status in the community to which they belong. The author has fruitfully used the social phenomena as a strategy to translate both the interpersonal communicative context and the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors and to embody the social and cultural identity of an indigenous Malayalam community.

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