

Remnants of the Past in the Present: Decay as a Symbol of Cultural Memory in *Translations* and *The Siege of Krishnapur*

Vanshita Tuli

Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies

tulivanshita@gmail.com

New Delhi, India

Abstract

Ruins, relics, and spectral traces of the lost world dominate the empire's landscapes of war and colonization, transforming ruin into a battleground of history and memory. The ruins of broken buildings and eroding tongues are not mere residuals of time past, but points of cultural patrimony, resistant emblems, and vestiges of cultural capital in both J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* and Brian Friel's *Translations*. Both texts, although located in distinct colonial settings—India and Ireland—share a common historical origin in British imperial domination, demonstrating how colonialism entailed similar kinds of cultural erasure and material exploitation.

Farrell's portrayal of a besieged British colonial outpost challenges the brittleness of imperial ideology by highlighting the limits of material superiority and the breakdown of colonial authority. European artefacts, porcelain, and Victorian rationality are all shown to be meaningless in the face of collapse. Meanwhile, Friel's depiction of linguistic displacement in 19th-century Ireland highlights how Indigenous names and histories are erased, turning cultural heritage into a commodity and a topic of imperialist discussion. Language is both a remnant and a battlefield, shaped by colonial forces yet sustained through literary and oral resistance, as evidenced by the erosion of educational traditions. In postcolonial tales, ruins and relics are transformed from immobile monuments into active forces that reinterpret deterioration as a sign of fortitude and resiliency. Through an analysis of the cultural afterlives of ruins, this research challenges the notion that imperial legacies can ever be wholly eradicated, demonstrating how postcolonial literature transforms "sites of decay" into potent areas of reclamation. What remains in the wake of the empire, whether in the form of literature, folklore, or repurposed ruins, serves as a battleground for the recovery of historical agency, ensuring

that the past is never truly forgotten. Given that British colonial tactics influenced both India and Ireland, the analogy highlights the ongoing struggle of postcolonial countries to reclaim their histories from the ruins of imperial control.

Keywords

Cultural memory, Colonialism and Postcolonialism, Ruins and Decay, Linguistic Erasure, Imperial Fragility, Historical reclamation, Cultural studies.

Introduction

The landscapes of empire, conflict, and colonisation are often accompanied by ruins and relics, remnants of the past that remain as silent witnesses to historical upheaval. These relics are potent symbols of cultural memory, conveying both resistance and loss, whether in the form of decaying structures, vanished objects, or extinct languages. Decomposition is a contested space in postcolonial literature, serving not merely as a symbol of destruction but as a site where history is preserved, erased, or reimagined. The conflicts between imperialist narratives and indigenous reclamation are made evident by the tangible and linguistic remnants left by colonial powers, which turn deserted areas and lost customs into places of lasting significance.

Brian Friel's *Translations* and J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* portray ruins, both linguistic and material, as prime agents of cultural critique and resistance. Farrell unrigs imperial authority by showing how colonial artifacts lose meaning during rebellion, their decay symbolizing the fragility of British dominance. Friel explores the expunging of Irish place names as a form of cultural dispossession, constructing language itself as a site of colonial conflict. Together, the texts unravel how ruins become spaces of memory, challenging dominant narratives and enabling postcolonial reimaginings of identity and survival.

This study examines how postcolonial literature reconfigures sites of decay—ruins, lost languages, and cultural remnants—as active participants in the construction of memory and identity. Through *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *Translations*, it exhibits how imperial symbols lose meaning amid collapse, while suppressed languages and traditions endure as acts of resistance. By foregrounding the afterlives of colonial relics, the study argues that decay is not

erasure but transformation, where what remains continues to redefine cultural identity and challenge dominant historical narratives.

Cultural Memory and Heritage

Collective memory is preserved in two primary ways: on one hand, communicative memory, which involves oral communication, and on the other, cultural memory, which encompasses tangible records. Cultural memory, defined by commonalities and passed on through tradition, literature, and memorials, plays a crucial role in shaping collective identity. According to Maurice Halbwachs, it is a social construct formed by everyday habits and institutions. It shapes historical accounts, national identity, and political ideologies. Whereas its erasure shatters identity, preservation creates resilience and provides marginalized populations with a space to counter hegemonic narratives and reclaim historical power. Memory has been defined in a complicated manner, with scholars approaching its definition from divergent viewpoints.

“Though most identify memories with historical material culture, contending that it arises from the intentional use of people and groups with previous experiences” (Ricoeur 1999), there are those who highlight that memory is performative and entails active engagement with the present (Nora 1989). These views highlight the dynamic nature of cultural memory, demonstrating its capacity to both shape and be shaped by historical and contemporary forces. German Egyptologist and cultural theorist Jan Assmann examines the social aspects of memory in his essay "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" (1995). Drawing on the theories of Maurice Halbwachs, Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory, which emerges through ordinary spoken exchanges, and cultural memory, which is preserved in material forms such as texts, rituals, and monuments. He posits that memory is not a personal experience, but a social process informed by societal paradigms and passed across generations (Assmann 125).

Although based on lived experiences, cultural memory differs from daily remembrance in that it transcends everyday interactions. Unlike cultural memory, personal memory is anchored to fixed historical moments preserved within cultural forms, including religious rituals, legal codes, and institutional policies. These fixed points are what Assmann has termed "figures of memory," and they play a central part in the construction of long-term collective identity (Assmann 130). Building on these concepts, Pierre Nora discusses the evolution of memory in contemporary societies in his influential essay “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de

Mémoire” (1989). He contends that modern societies have moved away from a period of organic, lived memory, in which history was passed down in a direct form within communities, and now memory is artificially maintained through "sites of memory" (Nora 7). This shift indicates a larger cultural shift in which memory is no longer an internal, shared experience, but rather one that is built and oftentimes disputed and defined by political and ideological pressures. Nora points to this contrast when he declares, "There are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory" (Arora 16). This artificially built nature of memory is especially salient in postcolonial work, wherein nations grapple with recovering repressed histories and contesting hegemonic narratives.

Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Struggle for Cultural Memory

Colonialism is the process by which a nation establishes and exerts political, economic, and cultural dominance over another region or people. This often results in the extraction of resources, the marginalization of indigenous traditions, and the imposition of foreign governance systems. During the 18th and 19th centuries, European colonial expansion was primarily motivated by economic interests and justified through ideologies that promoted racial superiority and the so-called “civilizing mission.”

Postcolonialism, in contrast, is an academic and political discourse that analyses the lasting impact of colonial rule on former colonies, both during and after independence. It critically examines how colonial ideologies and structures continue to shape political, economic, and cultural systems, often perpetuating neocolonial influences. A key focus of postcolonial studies is the struggle to reclaim cultural memory and identity by reviving indigenous languages, traditions, and histories that were marginalized under colonial rule. For instance, the British imposed English as the dominant language in India and Ireland, resulting in the decline of native languages. Similarly, colonial education systems devalued local knowledge and histories, prioritizing Eurocentric perspectives. Postcolonial movements aim to restore these cultural elements through language revitalization, revised curricula, and the preservation of indigenous heritage.

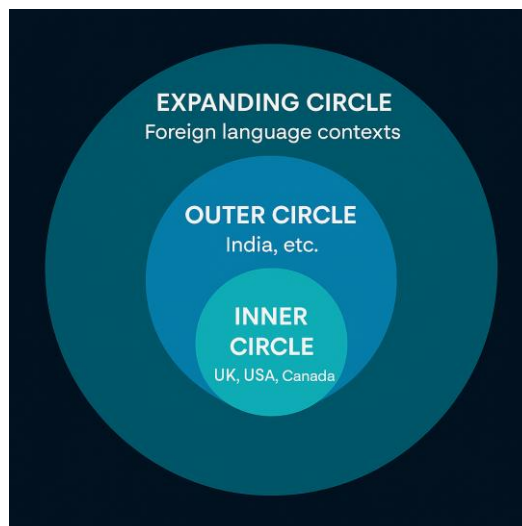
Colonialism did not merely extract wealth and resources from India and Ireland; it fundamentally reshaped the very fabric of their societies. The imposition of British rule led to the forced reformation of indigenous communities, restructuring their economies, social

hierarchies, and cultural landscapes to serve the interests of the empire. As Ania Loomba observes, “Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries” (Loomba 20).

British imperialism functioned like an unstoppable flood, a carefully woven web of deception that engulfed native lands. Stripped of autonomy, people obeyed commands as if manipulated by invisible strings, their agency gradually eroded under the weight of foreign rule. This phenomenon was particularly evident in British India, where intermediaries primarily executed governance. Loomba explains: “Taxes were collected through hereditary Indian collectors who were liable for a fixed sum as laid down in the ‘Permanent Settlement’ of 1793. This kind of ‘shallow penetration’ can be seen as a prototype for modern imperialism, which functions largely through remote control” (Loomba 24).

Languages that had thrived for centuries began to fade as English took their place. This transformation was not incidental but deliberate, a strategic move to reorient the minds of the colonized toward European ideals. Thomas Babington Macaulay, the architect of British education policy in India, explicitly outlined this objective in his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), stating that “English education would train natives who were ‘Indian in blood and colour’ to become ‘English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect.’ These people would constitute a class who would protect British interests and help them rule a vast and potentially unruly land” (Macaulay 249). The British sought to create a class of intermediaries serving as cultural and ideological extensions of the empire, ensuring its longevity even without direct colonial rule. This transformation was not incidental but deliberate, a strategic move to reorient the minds of the colonized toward European ideals. In India, eight classical languages—Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Bengali, and Marathi—form the rich foundation of the country's literary and philosophical traditions. In comparison, 22 languages are officially recognized under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. However, many of these languages suffered marginalization under colonial rule and continue to struggle for revival and relevance in the face of English dominance and Hindi centralization. Institutions such as the Sahitya Akademi, Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), and various state language academies are working to preserve and promote these endangered linguistic heritages through publication, research, translation, and education initiatives.

This linguistic transformation laid the foundation for what Braj Kachru later referred to as "Babudom English," a distinctive form of Indian English that arose from this colonial education



system. Kachru's model of

Fig 1

"Centric circles" divides English usage into three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle. The *inner circle* represents countries where English is the native language, such as the UK, the USA, and Canada. The *outer circle* includes former British colonies, like India, where English has become a second language and is institutionalized in various domains of public life. Lastly, the *expanding circle* refers to countries where English is a foreign language but is still widely used in global communication.

Within India, this *Babudom English* evolved as a unique form of Indian English, blending English with regional languages and local cultural nuances. It is characterized by distinctive phonetic features, word formation, and sound patterns that often diverge from standard British or American English. For example, the pronunciation of certain vowels and consonants is influenced by the phonetic structures of indigenous languages, resulting in a distinct form of English with its own sound system. Moreover, *Indian English* has developed its lexical items and idiomatic expressions, influenced by local culture, and often uses Indian grammatical structures and syntax, making it distinctly different from its Western counterparts. This unique form of English enabled the maintenance of British influence while simultaneously incorporating elements of Indian linguistic identity, creating a hybrid that remains a powerful tool of communication and identity in post-colonial India.

British cultural domination extended to Ireland, where language suppression was central to control. Policies discouraged the use of Gaelic in education, governance, and daily life, pushing it to the margins. British administrators further erased Irish identity by renaming towns and landmarks, reinforcing ideological dominance. Land policies deepened dependence, reducing the Irish to tenant farmers while British landlords extracted wealth from them. Loomba highlights: “British policies prioritizing agricultural exports over the survival of the local population worsened the famine. As food was shipped away, millions starved, and countless others were forced to emigrate, permanently altering Ireland’s demographic and cultural landscape” (27).

Despite its official status, Irish remains a minority language in everyday use. Institutions like Foras na Gaeilge, Conradh na Gaeilge, and Gael Linn are actively engaged in revitalizing Irish through education, media, and cultural programming, aiming to restore its place as a living national language. Both India and Ireland demonstrate how colonial legacies continue to shape linguistic hierarchies, highlighting the importance of institutional efforts in reclaiming suppressed linguistic identities.

The suppression of Gaelic not only erased vocabulary and place names, but it also left enduring phonological traces in the way English is spoken in Ireland today, particularly in Northern dialects shaped by centuries of colonial contact. British colonialism led to intense language contact between Irish Gaelic, Scots, and English, resulting in significant phonological change. The English, imposed as the dominant language, infiltrated the Gaelic speech communities, especially in Ulster.

"The degree of admixture from English, Irish, and Scots in the contemporary dialects of NI reflects various external forces... created by a combination of external factors unique to this part of the world. Of particular importance is historical contact between populations induced by various migratory processes, including colonisation." (Corrigan, p. 14)

This interaction contributed to the gradual shift from Irish Gaelic to English in daily life. However, many Gaelic phonetic patterns were retained in Irish English, resulting in a distinct dialect. In Northern Ireland in particular, phonological traces of Gaelic remain evident. These include **rhoticity** (a strong pronunciation of /r/ sounds), **TH-stopping** (e.g., “thing” pronounced as “ting”), and **rising intonation patterns** that reflect Gaelic prosody. As Corrigan

notes, these features make Irish English unique and often misunderstood by outsiders (Corrigan, pp. 122, 164). Such traits act as sonic remnants of cultural memory, preserving Gaelic influence even in the face of linguistic erosion.

Colonial education systems reinforced cultural subjugation. English literary studies, introduced through British educational policies, became a façade for economic and material exploitation. Schools and universities became instruments of ideological conditioning, ensuring that colonial subjects internalized Western narratives while their histories and traditions were devalued. Declan Kiberd, in his analysis of Irish colonialism, underscores this process through the concept of translation as a form of conquest. He notes that “a root meaning of ‘translate’ was ‘conquer.’ Gaelic was nearly eradicated as a language. This is a clever way of making the ‘postcolonial’ audience aware of its lack of Gaelic and reflect upon the legacy of colonisation” (Kiberd 184).

The British also employed a divide and rule strategy, intensifying religious divisions that ultimately culminated in the catastrophic Partition of India in 1947. This event led to mass displacement, communal violence, and deep-seated religious tensions that continue to shape India-Pakistan relations and internal politics.

Despite the enduring scars of colonial rule, Ireland and India have actively worked to reclaim their cultural heritage. Ireland continues to strengthen the Irish language, while India has revived traditional knowledge, marking a resurgence of cultural pride (Kiberd 220). However, the long-term effects of colonial-era divisions persist. Ireland still grapples with tensions surrounding reunification, while India continues to face communal conflicts rooted in colonial policies. These enduring struggles highlight the lasting impact of colonialism on the social and cultural fabric of both nations, reinforcing the necessity of cultural memory as a tool for reclamation and resistance.

Ruins as Symbols of Imperial Fragility in *The Siege of Krishnapur*

J.G. Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur* is a powerful critique of British imperial ideology, using the physical and symbolic decay of colonial relics to highlight the fragility of the empire. Set during the 1857 Indian Rebellion, the novel follows a besieged British garrison in India, where the material and ideological symbols of British civilization crumble under siege. Farrell examines how these structural and conceptual ruins undermine the sense of British permanence, revealing colonial rule as a temporary, unstable construct. *The Siege of*

Krishnapur is a potent symbol of imperial fragility, illustrating the transient nature of colonial dominance and the limits of European superiority in the face of indigenous resistance.

At the heart of the siege stands the Residency, initially portrayed as a stronghold of British authority and order. Designed to embody the stability and endurance of the empire, the Residency represents the administrative and military control imposed over the colony. However, as the siege intensifies, the Residency's gradual destruction under cannon fire mirrors the unraveling of British colonial ideology.

Initially, the residence serves as a well-maintained structure housing British officials and their families, thereby reinforcing the empire's belief in its own cultural and military supremacy. The British inhabitants place unwavering faith in their architecture and engineering, assuming it to be superior to Indigenous structures. They believe the residence projects strength, stability, and permanence—an unshakable symbol of British rule in India. Convinced of their technological and military superiority, they dismiss the idea that native resistance could seriously threaten their authority.

However, as the rebellion escalates, the Residency collapses under sustained attacks—the walls designed to provide protection crack and crumble, exposing the empire's vulnerability. The European-style architecture, once seen as a marker of progress, proves inadequate in the face of the relentless assault. Farrell gradually reveals the fragility of British imperial confidence. 'The Residency', once a beacon of civilization, transforms into a ruin that testifies to the empire's weakness. The destruction of the Residency not only dismantles a physical structure but also shatters the illusion of imperial permanence.

"We look on past ages with condescension, as a mere preparation for us... but what if we are a mere after-glow of them?" (Farrell 243).

This moment encapsulates the novel's main critique of imperial arrogance. The Collector experiences an epiphany, realizing that the British Empire is not the pinnacle of civilization. However, it is another transient force, destined to fade like those that have come before it. As he watches the Residency disintegrate, he confronts the unsettling truth that the empire's dominance is neither inevitable nor eternal. The destruction of the Residency forces the British characters to reconsider their place in history. Stripped of their perceived invincibility, they are left to grapple with the reality that imperial rule is not as secure as they had believed. Farrell

utilizes this downfall to challenge the narrative of empire as an enduring force, exposing its ultimate vulnerability to resistance and the passage of time.

Beyond its physical deterioration, the Residency also becomes a site of psychological and moral collapse. The British characters, initially confident in their ability to withstand the siege, descend into paranoia, hysteria, and despair as their resources dwindle. Their initial faith in British superiority weakens alongside the crumbling walls of the Residency. As disease and starvation spread, their belief in the empire's ability to protect and sustain them erodes. Once a stronghold of order and control, the Residency transforms into chaos, revealing the fragile foundation upon which British authority rests.

Farrell further exposes the rigidity of British rationality through their futile attempts to maintain order. Even as their survival becomes increasingly uncertain, the British cling to absurd notions of decorum and hierarchy, unable to adapt to their worsening reality. Despite starvation and disease, they insist on upholding outdated social structures, unwilling to acknowledge their diminishing power. This cognitive dissonance reflects the broader inability of imperial ideology to evolve, reinforcing the theme of imperial fragility. In many ways, the Residency is a microcosm of the British Empire—grand and imposing initially, but ultimately feeble and unsustainable. Just as the Residency cannot withstand the siege, the British colonial enterprise in India cannot sustain itself indefinitely.

Beyond the Residency, *The Siege of Krishnapur* critiques imperial fragility through the symbolic breakdown of colonial artifacts. Throughout the novel, objects such as porcelain busts, chandeliers, books, and scientific instruments initially symbolize European superiority. These items represent the British belief in progress, rationality, and cultural refinement—qualities they believe justify their rule over India. However, these artifacts lose significance as the siege drags on, revealing the illusion of imperial permanence. Chandeliers become useless without electricity, porcelain busts are repurposed for fortification, and scientific instruments fail to solve the pressing realities of starvation and disease. The artifacts, once symbols of European advancement, now highlight the absurdity of imperial arrogance.

Farrell critiques the colonial mindset that equates material possessions with superiority. By demonstrating how these objects become worthless in the chaos of the siege, he exposes the hollowness of imperial ideology, which rests on a fragile foundation of cultural arrogance rather than genuine resilience. Fleury, the Collector's daughter and a young Irish protagonist, voices this disillusionment with imperial values. "Culture is a sham... It is a cosmetic painted on life by rich people to conceal its

ugliness" (Farrell 312). Fleury's statement encapsulates the novel's critique of British cultural pretensions. The collapse of the siege reveals that the so-called achievements of empire—its artifacts, customs, and intellectual advancements—are mere facades that cannot withstand real hardship. Farrell frequently discusses the Great Exhibition of 1851, which celebrated British technological and cultural supremacy. The Collector reveres the artifacts from this exhibition, believing they symbolize the pinnacle of human achievement. "Here in this room, gentlemen, you see the might of England; you see the fruits of civilization. You see, in short, why we are here" (Farrell 115).

However, as the siege continues, these objects prove utterly useless in the face of war, disease, and starvation. This critiques imperial hubris—the belief that Western civilization is immune to decay and decline. Farrell suggests that just as these artifacts crumble, so will the British Empire. By portraying the dismantling of these symbols, the novel underscores the arrogance of imperial ideology, revealing that material progress cannot protect against the brutal realities of history.

Ultimately, the fate of these colonial artifacts mirrors that of the empire. The Collector, once profoundly invested in the grandeur of British civilization, slowly comes to realize the exhausted nature of imperial authority. "It was strange, he thought, how quickly the rigid hierarchies of civilization had crumbled under siege, how swiftly the illusion of order had been stripped away." (Farrell 348). As British dominance in India wanes, the symbols of its supposed superiority become relics of a bygone era. Farrell critiques the fragility of colonial rule, demonstrating that beneath its polished surface, it is ultimately unsustainable in the face of historical forces. The British belief in progress and enlightenment collapses alongside the walls of the Residency, leaving only the ruins of empire behind.

Farrell challenges the myth of British cultural permanence through the reflections of key characters. The Collector, who once viewed history as a linear progression culminating in British supremacy, begins questioning the empire's durability. His doubts reflect the novel's central theme: no empire lasts forever. The siege of Krishnapur functions as more than a military conflict; it becomes an ideological siege that exposes the fragility of colonial power. "The Empire would last a thousand years, they said, and yet it trembles at the hands of men with old muskets and spears" (Farrell 301).

Farrell also explores how cultural constructs shape individual survival. The rigid class distinctions and gender roles that define British society initially dictate behavior within the besieged community. However, as conditions worsen, these constructs become increasingly

irrelevant. Women, once confined to passive roles, take up arms, while aristocratic gentlemen, once symbols of decorum, descend into desperation and savagery. The siege dismantles these social hierarchies, exposing their artificiality. “Even the ladies, once so delicate, have taken up arms; hunger makes savages of us all” (Farrell 347). The characters who once measured status by birth and etiquette now find that power belongs to those who endure. “In England, a man is a gentleman by birth. Here, a man is a gentleman only if he survives” (Farrell 356).

The siege reveals that survival instincts override socially constructed roles. As desperation takes hold, traditional notions of class and gender lose their meaning. The novel portrays the Indian landscape as untamable by imperial rule—eventually, it reclaims itself, pushing out foreign dominance. The British may have built roads, railways, and administrative systems, but their rule depended on force rather than genuine acceptance. The rebellion revealed their claim to India was never secure, reinforcing the idea that no empire lasts forever.

Linguistic Erasure and Cultural Survival in *Translations*

Brian Friel’s *Translations* (1980) is a powerful meditation on colonialism, cultural imperialism, and the erosion of linguistic identity. By depicting the British Ordnance Survey’s Anglicization of Irish place names, the play acts as both a representation and a commemoration of cultural ruin. Friel’s work is deeply embedded in cultural memory, illuminating how language functions as the vessel of a people’s heritage and how its systematic erasure signals a broader form of cultural decay.

The systematic replacement of Irish place names with their Anglicized versions serves as the most explicit representation of colonial power eroding indigenous identity. Owen, initially acting as a mediator between the Irish and the British, downplays the significance of this linguistic shift, describing it as “A legitimate enterprise” (Friel 37). However, Manus, his brother, immediately recognizes the more profound implications, stating: “That is what is being eroded!” (Friel 39).

This dialogue captures the heart of the colonial linguistic enterprise, not just a shift in vocabulary, but the whole dismantling of a cultural semiotic system. This exchange encapsulates the tension between assimilation and resistance, where colonialism operates not only through military conquest but also through the slow obliteration of cultural markers. Language is more than a tool for communication; it is a repository of collective memory, and the renaming of places reflects a subtle yet insidious form of cultural

erosion. Friel constructs the hedge school as a liminal space between tradition and modernity, where classical languages like Latin and Greek coexist with the native Irish tongue. The play foregrounds the shift from a polyglot humanist tradition to a monolingual, utilitarian linguistic model, aligned with British colonial governance. This educational transition represents a shift from diglossia, where multiple languages have clearly defined social functions, to linguistic homogenization.

This setting is a relic of a pre-colonial educational system being dismantled. Hugh, the headmaster, underscores the vulnerability of language and cultural knowledge when he declares, “Words are signals. They are not immortal” (Friel 52). His resignation to the impermanence of language reflects a broader realization that the loss of linguistic identity is inevitable under imperial domination. The hedge school students, already facing limited access to literacy in English, will encounter a future where their native tongue will become increasingly irrelevant. This impending linguistic extinction symbolizes a cultural decay that is both personal and national in scope. Furthermore, the play’s engagement with cultural memory positions it as a dramatic enactment of Ireland’s struggle against historical erasure.

What Friel captures here is the early stages of *pidginization*, a process in which elements of the colonizer’s language (English) are imposed upon a native linguistic structure to facilitate basic communication, often in colonial or trade contexts. In *Translations*, we do not witness the organic formation of a creole, but the violent suppression of the native tongue before such a syncretic linguistic evolution can occur. The imposed English is not assimilated into the Irish linguistic consciousness but remains an external, alienating force. This is perhaps most poignantly symbolized by the character of Sarah, the mute girl. Manus celebrates her initial attempt to articulate her name as a symbolic act of identity formation, a moment where language bridges silence and subjectivity. However, as the play progresses and colonial pressures intensify, Sarah regresses into muteness, embodying the silencing of an entire cultural identity. Her ability to say her name early in the play signals a fragile sense of self, but her later silence reflects the overwhelming force of colonial oppression.

The presence of Yolland, an English soldier enamored with Irish culture, complicates the colonial dynamic. His declaration, “Even if I did speak Irish, I would always be an outsider” (Friel 61), reveals an inherent alienation that underscores the impossibility of cultural integration under imperial rule. His eventual disappearance, presumed to be the result of

violence, signals the volatile nature of colonial encounters. The very structure of *Translations* enacts the decay it dramatizes. Though the characters are supposed to be speaking Irish, all dialogue is rendered in English, a dramatic irony that forces the audience to confront the paradox of linguistic representation. This technique mirrors the historical erasure of the Irish language, which is central to identity yet absent in public discourse. In this absence, the play draws attention to the untranslatability of cultural experience. It refuses to offer a seamless linguistic bridge, instead dwelling in the gaps, the silences, and the mistranslations that define colonial contact zones.

The significance of *Translations* as a literary act of cultural memory cannot be overstated. Friel is not simply documenting a historical moment but performing an act of remembrance. The play emphasizes that the colonial project is not merely a political endeavor, but also a psychological and cultural one, where language loss constitutes a rupture in historical consciousness. The absence of Irish dialogue in the play, despite the characters supposedly speaking it, forces the audience to engage with the paradox of representation. By framing language as a battleground of memory, identity, and power, Friel's *Translations* emerges as both a narrative of decay and a resistance against forgetting.

Instead of existing as fixed reminders, ruins and relics in postcolonial writing become active agents in the process of cultural reclamation. Both *Translations* by Friel and *The Siege of Krishnapur* by J. G. Farrell resist the idea that imperial legacies can ever entirely be removed. The disappearing Irish language in *Translations* and the decaying residency in *The Siege of Krishnapur* are not merely signs of cultural and physical decline; they are sites of negotiation for identity and historical agency. These ruins are palimpsests, places where erasure and writing are part of the same experience, calling out for both mourning and the production of meaning.

The "unhomely" as described by Homi Bhabha illuminates the uncertain position of colonial traces. For Bhabha, the postcolonial ruins interrupt the imperial continuum, remapping sites of domination onto zones of spectral return, where the past intrudes into and reworks the present. In *Translations*, the villagers' refusal to give up their native tongue, even silence, is an act of resistance that implies cultural annihilation is never complete. Likewise, in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, the destruction of colonial artifacts and ideals is an allegory for the collapse of imperial certainties, even as it poses complex questions regarding how history is archived, remembered, or selectively forgotten. Language, in both novels, is a powerful metaphor for

colonial brutality and postcolonial survival. In *Translations*, the silencing of characters such as Sarah, the Anglicization of Irish placenames, and the absence of Irish on stage enact how linguistic erasure is a tool of colonial domination. However, the very act of holding on to those names becomes an act of memory, making language a site of resistance. English, specifically the most elevated form of English, the Queen's English, becomes a sign of social excellence in *The Siege of Krishnapur*.

Fig 2

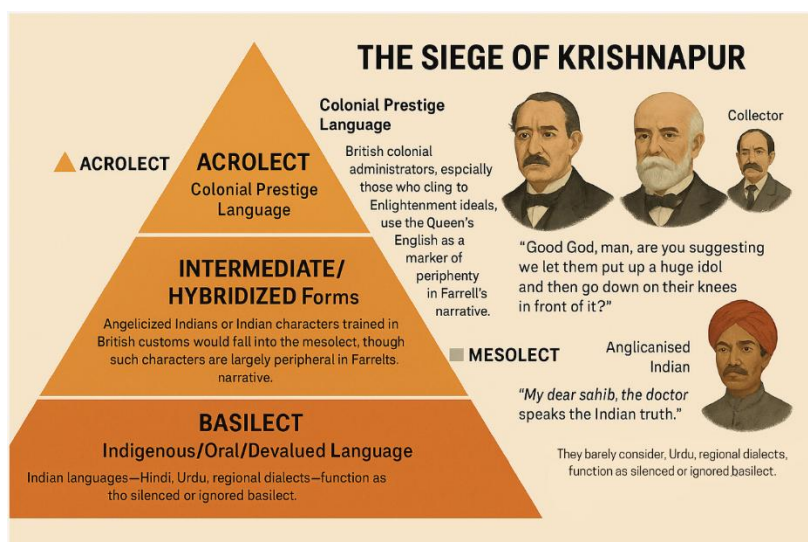
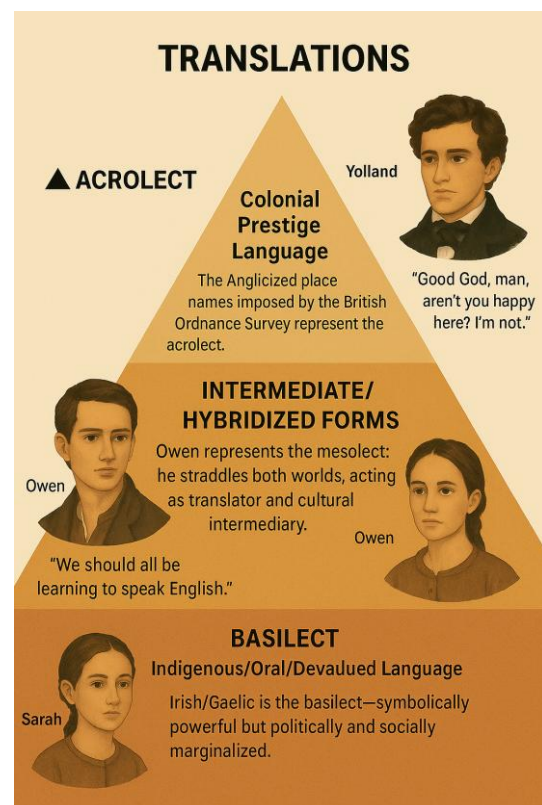


Fig 3



CONCLUSION

Here, the linguistic stratification referred to as the postcolonial creole pyramid¹ becomes a metaphor for colonial and postcolonial identity itself. The acrolect, exemplified by the Queen's English, was not only a linguistic model but a social construct of aspiration, granting authority and legitimacy. It served to alienate the colonized from their origins while bringing them closer to the imperial ideal. However, as Friel and Farrell both propose, this desire ultimately proves precarious. During times of crisis, political, cultural, or existential characters inevitably slide down the pyramid, back to the basilect or even to silence, where native meaning persists unassimilated. Postcolonial literature, therefore, reverses the colonial language

hierarchy. What was previously considered "low" or "corrupt"—the basilect, the oral tradition, the native language- becomes the most genuine location of cultural memory. Language, rather than a neutral instrument, is found to be a battleground of class, race, and memory, forged to impose dominance but reclaimed to revive quashed identities.

Here, *Translations* and *The Siege of Krishnapur* are both linguistic and historical interventions. They imply that whereas colonialism sought to overwrite native voices with an idealized, homogeneous acrolect, postcolonial awareness retrieves the disjunctions, silences, and vernaculars that imperial rhetoric conspired against. What had been weaponized as a means of stratifying and oppressing becomes the very medium by which the colonized express loss, endurance, and cultural revival.

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BIO NOTE

Vanshita Tuli is a Master's student in English at Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, Indraprastha University. Her research interests revolve around cultural memory and its manifestations in contemporary landscapes. She critically examines how ruins, relics, and the aesthetics of decay function as historical imprints, preserving past narratives while shaping modern spaces and collective consciousness. An emerging scholar with a keen interest in literature and cultural studies, Vanshita has made active contributions to academic discourse. She has presented papers at national and international seminars, engaging in scholarly conversations on literature, history, and cultural memory. During her undergraduate studies, she successfully published a research paper on Sylvia Plath as an androgynous poet, exploring gender dynamics in Plath's works and their broader literary implications. Beyond academia, Vanshita is also an accomplished poet, with her works featured in three anthologies. Through both her academic and creative pursuits, Vanshita continues to explore the intersections of history, memory, and artistic expression, seeking to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in cultural landscapes.