

Postcolonial Concerns in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

Postcolonial writings encapsulates the cultural contours effected by the imperial process of the colonial period to the present times. Postcolonialism invokes the idea of social justice, liberation and egalitarianism in its endeavour to counter the authoritarian structures of racism, discrimination and maltreatment. Postcolonial writing is suffused with suffering, pain, protest and resistance experienced in history. Apart from exploring difference or subjugation during the colonial period, postcolonial writers ardently question the postcolonial bias and oppression too. During the last two decades issues regarding ethnicity, displacement and gender, are being analyzed and scrutinized by these writers. Postcolonial writings accentuate the exposition of certain elementary oppressive structure in class, gender and caste. KIRAN Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* cover almost all relevant issues of a postcolonial society. They throw ample light on the condition of Indian society in the wake of globalization and liberalization and also examine the effects of multiculturalism and neocolonialism.

Key Words: Postcolonialism, Multiculturalism, resistance, subjugation, hybridity, diaspora.

Postcolonialism is an emancipatory concept. It seeks to emancipate the oppressed, depressed, the deprived and the down-trodden. G. Rai writes in the Indian Journal of English studies that postcolonial condition can be traced in the two archives – coercion and retaliation – which arise from the subordinating power of European colonialism and the narrative of resistance to colonialism. The process of returning to the colonial scene discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between the colonizer and the colonized. (Vol XLV 2008 PP 14). Ashish Nandi talks about two forms of colonization – one is the physical conquest of territories and the other is the colonization of minds, selves and cultures. (Nandi, 1983) postcolonial studies are preoccupied with issues of hybridity, creolization, in – betweenness, diaspora and liminality. The ideas of subaltern, multiculturalism and neo-colonization are also part of postcolonial studies.

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and egalitarianism in its endeavour to counter the authoritarian structures of racism, discrimination and maltreatment. Postcolonial writing is suffused with suffering, pain, protest and resistance experienced in history. Apart from exploring difference or subjugation during the colonial period, postcolonial writers ardently question the postcolonial bias and oppression too. During the last two decades issues regarding ethnicity, displacement and gender, are being analyzed and scrutinized by these writers. Postcolonial writings accentuate the exposition of certain elementary oppressive structure in class, gender and caste. (Rana, Randeep. Re-Markings, vol. 11. No.1, March, 2012 PP.52)

In his book *Understanding Postcolonialism*, J Hiddleston states that postcolonialism has become a major area of intellectual debate and innovation. It 'frequently offers a challenge to colonialism, but does not constitute a single programme of resistance, indeed, it is considered consequently by some to be rather vague and panoptic in its ever more ambitious field of enquiry'. (Hiddleston, 2012: 1) Furthermore, postcolonialism names the analysis of the mechanics of colonial power, the economic exploitation it brought with it, and a form of cultural and ethical critique or questioning. Overall, it can be agreed that postcolonialism names a set of political, philosophical or conceptual questions engendered by the colonial project and its aftermath. But the approach taken by the critics towards these questions varies significantly, with one school of thought tending to lean towards a denunciation of colonial politics and economics and to call for practical revolution and reform, and another stressing colonialism's ethical blindness and the cultural regeneration required in the wake of that oppression. Postcolonialism does not propose one answer to such questions but offers a framework for their expansion, exploration and clarification. It is not a straight forward answer but 'a way of thinking through critical strategies'. It is a 'multifaceted and open process of interrogation and critique. (Hiddleston, 2012: 4)

Hiddleston further elaborates that postcolonialism is a movement of questioning that seeks not to propose a single model or understanding for the colonial project and its aftershocks, but to analyze the nuances and implications of its multiple, varying manifestations. Postcolonialism is equally not a coherent strategy for a resistance, but it names the at times self-contradictory or internally conflicting movement in thought that examines, unpicks and compares multiple strategies and potential modes of critique. According to Hiddleston, postcolonialism is both 'an overly political movement, concerned above all with the empirical, material effects of colonialism and its aftermath' and 'an ethical reflection concerning, rather more broadly, relations between' self and other'. Postcolonialism thought, is on the one hand, seen to interrogate the underlying political structure of colonialism, and the mechanics of its promulgation and subsequent dismantling. On the other hand, however, an apparently alternative stand to this movement in modern thought forces us to rethink our understanding of deeper relations between peoples, cultures or communities, and the ethical encounter interrupted by colonialism but crucial to its denunciation.

Postcolonialism may be treated as having economic, political and cultural dimensions. It affects both the material and cultural, lives of an individual and a nations. Colonialism generally leads to political dethronement, economic deprivation and cultural detachment. The change in authority leads to a complex process of 'othering' and marginalization of the colonized subject.

Postcolonialism becomes, therefore, an ideology for reclaiming the lost authority and identity. It becomes an ethics against colonial hegemony.

In general, a postcolonial society observes oppression, exile, homelessness, nostalgia, ambivalence, liminality, hybridity, quest for identity, resistance and protest against hegemony. It demonstrates struggle for reclaiming the lost cultural space and authority. The questions of border, poverty, gender, race, language empowerment and entitlement etc assume significance. The questions of migration and insurgency become important.

The two novels under examination cover almost all prominent issues concerning a postcolonial society keeping Indian society in its centre. While *The Inheritance of Loss* takes up a wide range of issues found in postcolonial India, *White Tiger* shows the mechanism of internal colonization and protest against it.

The Inheritance of Loss is a representation of Indian society in a transition phase – a phase between colonialism and globalization; a phase involving both decolonization and neocolonization. The novel seems to examine the issues of ‘colonial neurosis, multiculturalism, modernity, immigrant’s bitter experiences, insurgency and the game of possession, gender – bias, racial discrimination, changing human relations, impact of globalization, *Isthal Puran* type of delineation of the North-East India, post – colonial chaos and despair, ethno – racial relationship between people from different cultures and background’s (Singh, Krishna, IJES, Vol XLVI, 2009, P.64). The novel shows how the tentacles of colonialism still hold the psyche of the people, how historical blunders have led to insurgency against statelessness and how the dream of globalization can result in an ugly nightmare.

The novel tries to examine how colonialism still holds sway on the mind of people in formerly colonized colonies and how globalization and multiculturalism are merely neo-colonialist jargons to exploit poor nations. The novel also tries to look into the mechanics of wealth-earning and the dynamic of drawing border and their consequences. The way to profit making lies in exploiting gap between nations and working one against the other.

In the backdrop of the residual impacts of colonialism, Kiran Desai examines the validity of the idea of globalization and multiculturalism. She raises the issues of illegal immigration and insurgency and tries to argue that the notions of globalization and multiculturalism are not the panacea for the cultural and economic maladies of the world. She seems to suggest that as long as there is the idea of ‘profit’ there will always remain a gap between nations, cultures and classes because profit can always be gained by the exploitation of gaps.

Desai quite unequivocally delineates the symptoms of the residual effects of colonialism through the thought and conduct of the characters. Almost all the characters the novel demonstrate a psychological disorder. The judge, for example, is a victim of colonial hangover as he is unable to fit in with his own countrymen and still appreciates English sensibility and copies English manners. He is a stranger in his own country. His grand-daughter Sai is an estranged Indian with English education and English manners. Her lover Gyan, the Nepali tutor also feels a sense of dislocation. Biju, the son of the cook is disillusioned and is compelled to lead a shadow life in the basement kitchens in the US. The cook feels a sense of disappointment on working for Jemubhai. He regards it a severe comedown from his father who served only white men (63). He

feels that his son is cooking English food ‘angrezi khana only’ and he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian. (17). The other characters such as Lola, Noni, Pixie and Mrs. Sen are enamoured by the British ways. Lola treats India as a sinking ship. Father Booty and Uncle Patty are men with colonial mind who have lived in India for fort-five years as ‘Indian foreigners’ (220).

In this novel Kiran Desai wants to capture ‘what it means to travel between the East and the West’ (Desai, BBC Interview, 2006). It was this feeling of being caught between the two continents that infuses the novel with sadness over Globalization and with pleasure at the surviving intimacies of Indian life. John Sutherland, the Chairman Booker Prize has rightly called it ‘a globalized novel of the globalized world’ registering ‘the multicultural reverberations of the new millennium with the sensitive instrumentality of fiction’. (Quoted in Sinha, Sunita, 2008:138).

The Inheritance of Loss touches upon a large number of issues prevalent in a postcolonial setting. Taking a broad canvas from Kalimpong to New York and from London to rural Gujarat; Desai sketches the homelessness and exile, longing and insurgent struggle to reclaim identity, poverty, despair, colonial neurosis of a shadow class and above all the vagaries of globalization and multiculturalism. She delineates the intricate design of dislocation and the longing for relocation. The ideas of mimicry hybridity ambivalence, liminality, subalternity etc. have also been incorporated. Pankaj Mishra (<https://bookmarks.Reviews>) writes in his review of the novel.

Although it focus on the fate of a few powerless individuals, Kiran Desai’s extraordinary new novel manages to explore with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary, international issue, globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence.

Mishra states that in the novel ‘Desai describes the lives of the people fated to experience a modern life as a continuous affront to their nations of order, dignity and justice’.

In fact The Inheritance of Loss is a sincere account of uprootedness and dislocation, and the gap between nations and cultures. It explores the gap between dreams and reality and between the tall promises of justice, equality, globalization, multiculturalism and the actual practice. According to Krishna singh:

“The novel is essentially a study of losses – loss of cultures, loss of identity, loss of human relations, loss of emotional binding, loss of human values, loss of rationality, loss of peace and harmony, loss of human beings’ faith in each other etc. sense of loss in an integral part of every character’s life; they are insecure, and unmoored, struggling to survive in the modern world, unsure of whether, they will see the benefits of globalization; characters unnecessarily feeling inferior due to their Indian heritage.” (IJES, Vol XLVI, 2009 P.72)

Using a Kaleidoscopic techniques Desai presents in this novel the identity crisis, loss of faith in human values, a sense of alienation and above all a deep sense of nostalgia and longing to regain the emotional self. The novel shuttles between first world and third world ‘illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of post colonialism’.

The White Tiger, on the other hand, depicts a postcolonial third world country's social reality in the backdrop of economic liberalization. It depicts a dark world of poverty, unemployment, corruption and crime. The vagaries of corrupt democratic system and the evil effects of crony capitalism have been delineated in the novel. It is truly a story of a half-baked Indian. The world of darkness and the world of light have been shown in the novel and the conflict between 'big-bellies' and 'small bellies' has also been described. The mechanism of oppression and exploitation along with the resultant anger and protest has been neatly delineated here.

According to Shail Bala (IJES, XLIX – 2012, P169), 'The novelist visualizes India as a big and boisterous jungle where hierarchy, sycophancy, corruption and ruthlessness are the halm of the affair. He feels that after independence jungle law has replaced zoo-law, where the youths are out of job and have become helpless.'

The story of the novel moves from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad, to Delhi and finally to Bangalore, depicting poverty, disease, filth, corruption, exploitation on the one hand and the mechanism of wealth earning and luxury on the other hand. The writer tries to show how the hegemonic structure of exploitation created by the masters operates. He also tries to show master slave-relation and how the slave is unable to break the dominant structure. The writer uses the metaphor of the 'Rooster Coop' to symbolize the helplessness of the slaves. He uses large number of animal images to portray a dark animal world. He creates the protagonist Balram Halwai in the form of a White Tiger who has the guts to break the Rooster Coop. Binod Mishra sees in Balram the re-creation of Anand's Bakha and Arundhati Roy's Velutha (Re-markings vol. No-2. 2010 P63). However, Balram's moral anger is fiercer and he successfully revolts against domination and is not 'caught'. He is able to realize in the end what it does not mean to be a slave. Thus Balram becomes a symbol of revolt against perpetual slavery. He becomes able to change his destiny by becoming a citizen of the world of light unlike Bakha who remains clueless and Velutha who is killed in the end Balram kills his master takes his money and name and flies away to Bangalore to start his own business. He takes recourse to 'Machiavellian' ideal to keep his house in order once he is forced to own the crime committed by Pinki Madam. From a driver to a master, Balram turns to a master of drivers in Bangalore. He realizes that he was fruitlessly looking for the keys of the prison gate, it was already opened. Balram's protest is not an individual's protest; it is the protest of a class.

In The White Tiger Adiga seems to present a conflict between Master and slave. This conflict is interesting because the driver Balram hates his master Ashok, yet he seems to love him. This love-hate relationship is quite symptomatic of colonial impact on the psyche of the colonized. Balram feels that his master owns him 'body, mind and arse. He feels that slavery and loyalty for his maser has been hammered into his mind. The hegemonic structure of the class of the masters has created a moral frame in which loyalty to the ruling masters is a moral obligation of the slaves. Moreover, most slaves are forced to own the crimes of their masters due to fear, compulsion or offer of some gifts. The slave class is deprived and marginalized and demoralized to the extent that given a chance of freedom they refuse to be free-much like the roosters in the coop who just wait their turn to be butchered, not attempting to break the coop. it is Balram who realized that it was foolish to look for the keys to open the doors. The fact is that the doors are already opened. So Balram proves himself to be the representative of the subaltern class

revolting against the bourgeoisie class. Unlike most other subaltern characters, Balram pays his master in the same coin and runs away from the world of darkness to the world of light. Unlike other slaves, Balram does not accept the hegemony, he rebels. In an interview with Stuart Jeffries (www.theguardian.com) Adiga says:

“Balram is my invisible man, made visible. The White Tiger will break out of his cage”.

Balram speaks out against “brutal injustices” and “sordial corruption in Indian society. His story is a table of ‘bribery, corruption, skullduggery, toxic traffic jams, theft and murder’. (ibid). Adiga skillfully portrays the Hegelian dialectic of master-slave relationship. However, he makes the slave kill his master to achieve freedom. The slave is ready to risk anything in order to realize even for a moment what it means not to be a slave. The masters very carefully craft a value system that makes the slaves voluntarily accept their slavery. Most slaves succumb to this slavery trap. Even Balram feels the inner urge to press the foot of his master.

In the novel Aravind Adiga very carefully draws the dichotomy of rich-poor, master – slave, rural-urban, darkness-light and big-bellies, small bellies. He seems to suggest that even after the end of colonialism the colonizer – colonized relation persists. As the story moves from a very small village to a big metropolitan centre the master slave relation goes on changing location. From a simple school teacher to a minister the network of corruption continues. There is poverty, corruption, and filth, disease in the midst of wealth, power, and luxury. The rich and the powerful create a system of perpetual servitude. They create a hegemonic structure that makes the subject class voluntarily accept servitude and injustice.

Balram is unlike Biju in the *Inheritance of Loss*. Biju like Balram loves his masters. When he is able to get visa for going to the US he feels very lucky. However, he suffers a lot of exploitation and humiliation working in unhygienic condition in basement kitchens before finally returning to India. He is looted in India too and returns home empty – handed. He is unable to throw his slavery. Balram, on the other hand, succeeds in breaking the cage by killing his boss.

Thus the two novels address almost all major postcolonial concerns of postcolonial India. While *The Inheritance of Loss* covers a wide range of themes, *The White Tiger* is more focused. In Kiran Desai’s novel we find themes like hangover of British colonialism, hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence, the fallacy of Globalization and multiculturalism, the hollowness of the new American Dream; longing, nostalgia and loss; poverty and insurgency; love of colonial values and manners, ideas of profits, and fallacious of drawing borders. In Aravind Adiga’s novel, on the other hand, we find poverty, corruption, crime injustice, exploitation, crony capitalism and the effects of hegemony. Overall, the two novels show the elements of colonialism and neocolonialism in the fabric of the Indian society in the Post-colonial era. In them we can find how colonialism still holds sway on the psyche and behaviour and manners of the characters. The two novels can be read as a social history of postcolonial India, particularly in the post eighties.

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