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INDIA IN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

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Abstract

Within a postcolonial context, the image of India in Indian English novels offers a wealth of opportunities to explore the connections between literature, history, and identity. From the colonial encounter to the current globalized moment, this book examines how Indian English fiction creates, negotiates, and reinterprets the concept of "India." The study examines how English narratives, which were originally a colonial imposition, have evolved into a medium for expressing indigenous histories, cultural memory, and socio-political realities. It does this by drawing on postcolonial theoretical viewpoints by Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Early Indian English novels, including those by R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand, frequently depicted India as a developing nation that balanced the desire for modernization with the restoration of precolonial customs. This picture is complicated by post-independence and post-Emergency novels by authors such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and others, which present India as a patchwork of languages, religions, regions, and social classes while addressing concerns of globalization, migration, partition, and communalism. These works' representations of India go beyond simple geography to serve as a symbolic, cultural, and ideological landscape influenced by the conflicts between regional identities and international discourses.

Key-words: India; Indian English novel; postcolonial literature; national identity; hybridity; cultural representation; colonial discourse; subalternity; nationalism; globalization.

From a postcolonial standpoint, there is no question that a variety of social, economic, and political factors have influenced the development of the colonial subject. This plurality is therefore necessary for a postcolonial rewriting of the past, and it is addressed to some degree in history and politics courses. Literary debates, however, only briefly touch on this topic. Generally speaking, the writers' objective has been to re-evoke cultural values so that readers can automatically accept men and women into a postcolonial valency. This is reaffirmed when Raja Rao states in *Kanthapura*'s foreword that "[t]he tempo of Indian life must be infused into

our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs" (v). It is hoped that this reading will help one understand how the nation in Indian writing in English becomes into, as Bhabha notes, a "system of cultural signification and a representation of social life" (1-2). The goal of the current analysis is to investigate the issue of Indian identity within a uniform historical context. In order to put the texts in context, the paper tries to briefly explain the postcolonial and nationalist milieu. It then analyses how English-language writers have failed to allow for fictional lives and have frequently restricted their characters into mainstream lifestyles, which has limited the characters' options for pursuing secular, democratic identities.

Postcolonial problems have remained a major focus of Anglo American literary groups for the last two to three decades. In Anglo American academia, the groundbreaking work of Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, and others made it clear that the colonized-colonizer struggle required careful, in-depth investigation. Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and other critics later entered the market, making it a lucrative venture for literary critics and academicians. Because it became clear that colonialism and imperialism are still very much a part of the modern world and are hard to escape, postcolonial studies also contributed to the development of a growing interest in the colonised region.

Colonial discourses emphasize how various texts and activities from the colonial and postcolonial eras are related to one another. However, it introduces the political aspect of the power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. The critical work *The Empire Writes Back* (1992) has become somewhat obsolete in the understanding of modern works since it ignores the dynamics of power in connection to history. The authors, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths, contend that all English-language literature from colonial-affected cultures can be interpreted as postcolonial, which has been criticised by several authors over the years for being too naïve. It is encouraging to observe, nevertheless, that postcolonial studies have addressed the problem of colonialism and its attitude of domination, leading to the development of theoretical and critical language that uses its own vernacular.

However, postcolonial studies have not taken into account the fact that Indian sub-continental fiction in particular has frequently emphasised the temporality of social existence and culture. Understanding topics like identity, culture, religion, tradition, and so on is greatly aided by the fiction that authors create. As Bhabha states, 'To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the totalization of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life' (3).

A binary opposition of self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc., has been attempted to be established by postcolonial theory. The references to time passed and post-time are also included in these binaries. McClintonk states:

> The postcolonial scene occurs in an entranced suspension of history as if the definitive historical events have preceded us and are now in the making. If the theory promises a de-centering of history in hybridity, syncretism, multidi-mensional time and so forth the singularity of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonization returns at the moment of its disappearance (255).

The issues of plurality and plurality itself are subordinated in this type of reading. Additionally, because it solely considers the idea that history is always a single, cohesive

structure, it misses the political aspects that are present right now. A "more emancipated and hopeful future" was hinted at in *The Empire Writes Back*, which established the notion that postcolonial writing is typically an act of resistance attempting to correct the center-margin axis (24). It was therefore thought that authors like Raja Rao, Anand, and others were exhibiting the center-margin axis in their works. The sheer existence of nationalism would have been a cause for concern if one of the issues had been the interpretation of literature via a postcolonial lens.

As a result of a sense of emancipation brought about by Indian nationalism in the 1940s, elation quickly gave way to a sense of disappointment and anger as neo-colonialism emerged. This occurred because, as Fanon noted, either bourgeois nationalism or a liberal anti-imperialist nationalist viewpoint had shaped the country's worldview. While the second group supported a more radical kind of liberal nationalism, the bourgeois nationalism represented the elite indigenous classes who sought to overthrow the colonial state. According to Fanon, the national elites' "mission" is to combat capitalism, which is widespread but disguised, "which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism" rather than to change the country it unites (152). To a certain degree, Spivak does assert a space for the subaltern, but even she is unable to go against the neo-colonial mindset. "In her own work, however, the deconstructive interrogation of subalternity is typically given precedence over the radical historiographical account of native agency," as Neil Lazarus states, supports this claim (206). It is noted historically that the marginalized natives were unable to challenge the locations of power. Regarding how inadequate subaltern politics were in the nationalist fight, Ranajit Guha states:

> The initiatives which originated from the domain of subaltern politics were not, on their part, powerful enough to develop the nationalist moment into a full-fledged struggle for national liberation. The working class was still not sufficiently mature in the objective conditions of the social being and its consciousness as a class-for-itself, nor was it firmly allied yet with the peasantry. As a result, it could do nothing to take over and complete the mission which the bourgeois had failed to realize. The outcome of it all was that the numerous peasant uprisings of the period, some of them massive in scope and rich in anti-colonialist consciousness waited in vain for a leadership to raise them above localism and generalize them into a nationwide anti-imperialist campaign. (6)

However, as Fanon explains, even after years of independence, the leader is unable to motivate the populace to pursue a specific goal; therefore this was not going to happen, not even later. He cannot teach them the way to national reconstruction or open the door to the future. According to Fanon, the leader most frequently reexamines the past of independence and remembers the holy unity of the liberation struggle. In the present, "he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then," even though the leader may have roused the people during the liberation struggle and promised them a forward march (168-69). As a result, nationalism is defeated, and it's interesting to see how Indian authors who write in English perceive this.

According to Edward Said's reading of W.B. Yeats, Yeats and Decolonization, literature has been instrumental in the re-establishment of a national cultural heritage, the reinstatement of native idioms, and the re-imagining and re-configuring of local histories, geographies, and communities during the ten-year fight for decolonization and independence from British control. As a result, literature not only encouraged aggressive resistance to external intrusions but also

made a significant contribution to the better, more imaginative lighting of the colonial people's world. Indian nationalism took a different turn if this was the case with Irish nationalism. The majority of English-language writers either portrayed a passive nationalist fight, transitioned into a token type of spiritualism, or highlighted the agonized lives of their disadvantaged characters. They also either committed to a return to culture and tradition or offered feeble answers.

Novels were written between the 1930s through 1960s to create a country that appeared to have a single identity—the nation's emancipation. These novels—Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958), and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960)—have been interpreted in a variety of ways as works that destabilized the dominance of the center through their narratives and masterful use of language. However, a second reading of these works reveals that they once again appear to deal with the creation of a single identity and the exaltation of the past. Reading *Kanthapura* is a wonderful way to gain a sense of this. In order to bring his people together by igniting the spirit of nationalism, the narrative is set during the last stages of the Indian national struggle. Kanthapura is portrayed as an Indian village that has been divided along caste lines in the novel's opening section: "Till now I've spoken of the Brahmin quarter. Our village had a pariah quarter too, a Potters quarter, a Weavers quarter and a Sudra quarter" (11). Through Moorthy and Rangamma's actions, the narrative aims to bring the community together. However, Moorthy understands that it is a difficult assignment when he requests that the local women spin yarn:

> 'I ask you, will you spin a 100 yards of yarn per day?' But Madanna's wife says, 'I'm going to have a child', and Satanna's wife says, 'I'm going for my brother's marriage', and her sister says, 'I'll spin if it will bring money .... And Moorthy feels this is awful, and nothing could be done with these women..... (78)

The novel concludes with Moorthy narrating a widely acknowledged truth: "And I have come to realize bit by bit, when I was in prison that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee House, and city cars that roll up the Babbar Mound, and gas lights and coolie cars, there will always be pariahs and poverty" (183).

Kanthapura has, in a sense, received a lot of appreciation for its skillful and brilliant narrative method, as well as for using the Harikatha form to tell the story. What is not understood, though, is that the book still clearly tells the tale of a Hindu country. There is very little room for the other, who also shapes the national identity. Rao appears to be purposefully supporting an Indian past that was the heyday of spirituality by resurrecting Gandhian ideology. His later piece*, The Serpent and the Rope*, provides evidence for this.

The second stage of Indian writing in English was the 1960s–1980s, when there was a shift from the outside world to the inside of one's head. This was crucial since the country was rebuilding itself and was also experiencing scientific and technological advancements. Authors like Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, and Shashi Deshpande attempted to portray their characters' selves as a result of the estrangement process. If Billy Biswas's escape into tribal society was made clear by Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), then Desai's women were characterized by hypersensitivity and experienced mental estrangement, isolation, and alienation.The pursuit of an almost nonexistent spiritual calm appeared to be the era's central issue. Deshpande's heroes, on the other hand, were enmeshed in marriage webs and were constantly fighting to break free from their recurring cycles.

It is interesting to note that Deshpande's women also experience stigma from problems like rape and believe they have been ensnared in the victimization cycle. The protagonist of her

short story "Intrusion" is trapped in a loveless marriage in which her husband has control over her body. The sexual assault becomes the central theme of *Roots and Shadows* (1983).*The Binding Vine* (2002) takes it a step farther by contrasting a narrativized or manuscripted rape tale with an actual rape. *The Binding Vine* comprises "three strands, the stories of three women: Kalpana, who is unconscious throughout; Mira, a poet who is now dead, and Urmila, who discovers Mira's poems and also learns about Kalpana," according to Deshpande in one of her interviews (233). The novel's protagonist questions the politics of supposedly typical heterosexual relationships and expresses awe at the ties between Vaana and Harish, Inni and Papa, and Mira and her husband. She also evaluates her own relationship with Kishore, her husband, critically. Desai too expects her ladies to be self-sufficient, but she eventually restricts their independence.

The women who are constantly attempting to reinvent themselves include Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), Anita Desai's Monisha in *Voices in the City* (1965), Maya in *Cry the Peacock* (1963), Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1989), and Bim in *Clear Light of Day* (1980). All of Desai's ladies are intellectual and well-educated, yet they all make good wives. The only possible exception is Bim in Clear Light of Day, who somewhat takes on the role of a symbolic representation of the country. Her iconography makes it clear that the issue of women's assimilation exists inside the Indian country. Thus, once again these narratives reveal a quest for the spiritual past and also depict women succumbing to social and cultural values of being good women who play their roles well.

The works created between the 1980s and the new century, are considered to be from the modern era. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* had a big impact on these books. Saleem Sinai's story raises issues regarding the Indian nation, its historical foundations, contemporary anxiety, and its neo-colonial mindset. The works of Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Anita Nair, and Shashi Tharoor serve as illustrations for these novels. Vikram Seth exploits the social realities in *A Suitable Boy* (1989) to mock Indian marriage arrangements, just as Ghosh subverts colonial constructions in novels like *The Glass Palace* and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) to extract a postcolonial space. Through a creative re-reading of the Mahabharata, India's ancient epic, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* explores the political history of the country. The book discusses political issues among other things and describes contemporary India as a country rife with political unrest.

Actually, the nation's history and formation had to be objective, but Tharoor takes a subjective attitude, and Ved Vyas, the narrator, frequently adopts Tharoor's viewpoint. The work portrays a troubled history rather than narrating it through myth. In the novel, Gangaji parodies Gandhiji by addressing Gandhian issues like celibacy and cleanliness. The Gandhi philosophy is only subsequently disseminated, as in *Kanthapura*, which is why Tharoor remarks during his book, "... we were not led by a saint with his head in the clouds, but by a master tactician with his feet on the ground" (122).

In a similar vein, Ghosh employs the time period of colonized Burma in *The Glass Palace* (2000) to follow the development of Rajkumar and Dolly, the main characters. In Burma, Malaysia, and India, he establishes the tone for his work and makes heavy use of a sense of patriotism through a variety of voices. The work vividly depicts historical situations, bringing Gandhi, Nehru, Bikaji Cama, and others to life. Once more, the battle of a fiercely patriotic homogenous nation engulfs all of these novels and authors, who fail to recognize that their fiction failed to find and create a new identity for the country. Another novelist from this era is Arundhati Roy, whose 1997 work *The God of Small Things* examines issues of political

ideology, communalism, and casteism. The novel is both a story of rights deprivation and a fictional critique of societal class relations.

Actually, Chetan Bhagat and Aravind Adiga's subsequent writing phase was influenced by this genuine examination of the Indian people. They belong to the modern era. Adiga in *The White Tiger* (2008) and Bhagat in *The Three Mistakes of My Life* (2008) and *Five Point Someone* (2004) both address the issue of an Indian society devoid of purpose that solely survives on the pursuit of wealth. In *The White Tiger*, Adiga aims to illustrate the connection between nationalistic identity and other pertinent facets of the issue, including class, gender, and sexual orientation. The novel attempts to show how the themes of marginality function in the Indian country by using specific socio-cultural and socio-political concepts in the construction of an Indian identity.

It is possible that the novelist's attempt to parody the Indian class system and the broader idea of national belonging is only a mask. On a certain level, *The White Tiger* is regarded as a genuine depiction of the modern India, a drawback of the magnificent country. The idea of Indianness—India as imagined and India as experienced—is shown to be inconsistent in the narrative. The protagonist Balram's aspirations and ambitions are in conflict with the deeply held convictions and religions of the other character, in this case, the employers Mr. Ashok and Pinky.

Thus, it is quite evident that Indian writers writing in English may depict an India with all of its issues, but they are also highly disturbed by the ideas of democracy and secularism. The Indian novelists, who write in English, for some reason, are unable to accommodate minorities and instead appear to be arguing for the survival of the majority. Thus, it appears that literature has developed a questionable notion of Indian identity to some degree. Indian writing in English must so transcend its mythology and history and forge new avenues for elucidating the concept of Indian nationalism. Finally, perhaps one might agree with Paranjape when he says, "When it comes to IE literature a related fallacy of the autonomy and self-sufficiency is also fostered. The idea is that IE literature not only stands on its own, by itself, but is more than adequate to understand India. Thus, willy-nilly, the very multilingual and multicultural context of the production or appreciation of this literature is undermined…. We need more and more to see IE literature in comparison and dialogue with its other Indian languages" (123). With a variety of voices, identities, and sociopolitical realities, the postcolonial Indian English novel depicts the country's transition from colonial subjection to cultural self-assertion. A crucial area for balancing tradition, modernity, and postcolonial identity, it emphasizes India's pluralism, resiliency, and changing consciousness by recreating history and reclaiming narratives.

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