

Asian Resonance

Post-Colonial Dilemma in Hari Kunzru's The Impressionist'

Abstract

Post-colonialism is a very wide and a relevant field of study . Its an umbrella term encompassing numerous fields of studies such as Diaspora, Ethnic studies ,Feminism etc. Its relevance has been and will always remain for the readers and writers of the academic circles of institutions and criticism. It served as a strong medium of answering back to the Empire –the ash and the residue of the fire that had once burned to its fullest.Hari Kunzru in his Pulitzer Award winning novel 'The Impressionist' discusses the intricate nuances of post-colonialism through the character of PranNath who dons numerous identities in an effort to grab a settled life somehow.

Keywords: Neocolonialism: Settlement made outside homeland for professional or monetary benefits.

Hybridity: mixing of two or more cultures or people of those culture.the outcome of that mingling.

Introduction

'The Impressionist' is the first novel of the U K based Indian English Writer Hari Kunzru who was named the Observer Young Travel Writer of the Year 1999. His first novel was received very well by the readers and the critics as well . The Week had published 'Hari Kunzru is so inventive , so irreverent and writes so well that the book is impossible to put down ...Kunzru handles the vast mass of factual details deftly... [his] style is exceptional, every page teemig with sentences ... which cry out to be quoted...'.The Bookseller has regarded the novel as 'A stunning literary debut '. The Impressionist is a comic saga about history, identity and home.

Aim of the Study

The paper aims at studying the underlying layers of colonial impressions that are left over and the involved nuances of the repressed personality in the process of leaving and then adopting another identity. Hari Kunzru has skillfully dealt and eschewed the postcolonial dilemma through the character of PranNath who consequentially becomes the 'citizen of the world', an impressionist,in the end.

Review of Literature

Wallis opines that it is not that representation possess an inherently ideological content but that they carry out an ideological function in determining the production of meaning. It is this representation of the ex-centrics i.e. the postcolonials which hails from the margins of the dominant West.

Postcolonialism underlines the need of self awareness at one side and on the other side it is an acknowledgement of that relationship-supressed and oppressed by humanism. Hari Kunzru's heart rending book 'The Impressionist' has the power to create those 'constituencies' that have their own effect on history. The novel represents the ex-centrics who stealth to reach the centre only to find that the margin has occupied the centre.

Twentieth century has seen numerous changes, upheavals, wars, revolutions, reforms, inventions, discoveries, formations, reformation amendments, different genres and various modification in them. Literature being the mirror of the society presented the true picture of the rapidly changing modern world of the then times. Twentieth century saw an important creative writing that hail from the former British colonies.

Though, all of them (former British colonies) have become independent nations now, but they still kept their ties intact with Britain politically, culturally and linguistically. This genre of literature is not only being acknowledged but also being adopted by an increasing number of educational institutions, world- wide. The Noble Prize winning authors such



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as Nadine Gordimer of South Africa, Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Derek Walcott of St. Lucia provide a prestigious ground in the face of other literatures of the world though, the term enraged certain writers to some extent as, Nayantara Sahgal had remarked at University of Kent, Canterbury, in August 1989: "First we were colonials, and now we seem to be post colonials. So is 'post colonial' the new Anno Domini which are to be everlastingly measured? My own awareness as a writer reaches back to x - thousand BC, at the very end of which measureless, timeless time the British came, and stayed, and left, and now they are gone, and their residue is simply one more layer added to the layer upon layer of Indian consciousness. Just one more."¹

After a long debate, over the term, for the literature that's written back to Empire has been settled for 'post-colonial literature'. The term is useful as well as important, as it raises the question that are large and important. The questions deal with large-scale historical phenomena that involves shifting power relationships. It provides a double awareness, first, of the colonial inheritance as it is still alive within a specific culture, community or country, and second, of the altering relations, between these cultures, communities and countries.

The literary mediation of this social process and change, opens up a wide range of study. The contemporary nature, of what has been called 'post-colonial' or for recent literatures in English even 'neo-colonial', has its focus on matters of larger, yet immediate interest - history, language, race, gender, identity, migration and cultural exchanges. The term implies a shift of perspective which "brought about a mental revolution which began to reconcile us to ourselves. It suddenly seemed that we too might have a story to tell, 'Rule Britannia!' to which we had marched so unselfconsciously on Empire Day now stuck in our throat ... the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well intentioned."²

So, we set down to write back the literature whose shades kept changing and adding various aspects and keep enlarging the term to suffice the pressing matters of language, race, gender, history and identity. But the writers consciously wrote from their place of origin (from wherever in the world they're placed) specifically addressing their own constituencies (the English speaking).

Hari Kunzru, the author of award-winning novel **The Impressionist** has successfully portrayed the dialectics of post-colonial nuances in the life-story of Pran Nath.

Pran Nath, is a high caste Hindu Kashmiri Brahmin, who is thrown out of his house for being an illegitimate son of an English officer. His mother, at the time of her marriage, happens to cross path with an English Forest Officer. The master and the real heir of the Razdaan Family of Agra, Pran Nath, very suddenly and shockingly was disowned by the family, at the time of his father's death. Nightmarishly the house, the culture, the language, the country, the

religion, the complexion etc other than which he knew nothing, became alien to him, unfortunately.

Disoriented, Pran Nath, ran, here and there, for shelter but of no avail. He was denied for it from everywhere. The Anglo-Indians refused to own him whereas English looked at him with disgust. He found himself at a juncture where he had no identity and the one he knew and owned so proudly, became an unreal one for him. The houseless, religionless, nameless, in other words, an identityless lad moved ahead on the heroic journey of the on-going evolution of one's position.

Shattered, Pran Nath, got wayward and moved with the flow of the tide, under the names of Rukhsana, white boy, Bobby etc. Each new name gave him the challenge of a new identity in which though unwillingly he tried to adjust but never got assimilated. As Bobby, he reached Bombay, where he got the chance to ape the mannerisms and accent of English language like English people. Owing to his white complexion, English mannerism and speech, he passed off as an English man several times. Fortunately or unfortunately, one night he got the chance to reach London as an English man, Jonathan Bridgeman, which he most willingly grabbed at the first opportunity. And struggled to become a complete Englishman and aspired to gather himself back in an identity, a complete one.

As Pran Nath Razdaan, he sat at the highest pedestal of Hindu society likewise he could not adjust at any intermediate position in the society (because Anglo-Indians were looked down by Hindus). His complexion and his mastery at aping English language and mannerism like Englishman helped him to, once again, achieve the highest position in the society (as English being highly esteemed in India). His education in being a complete Englishman got completed and he asserted himself as Bridgeman J.P., in the social circle of London. To prove himself as an English man, he undertakes the White man's burden of educating the blacks in South Africa. Ironically, he got defeated in his love by a dark-complexioned Negro, for English are artificial & feelingless, according to his beloved Astarte (an English girl). The highly-esteemed image of an Englishman in India and also all over the world got punctured so brutally that he could not take it and became an impressionist who could adjust in any identity, language, race or country that fate and time places him in.

The end of the novel where Pran Nath gleefully glides through the Sahara Desert in the guise of an Arab (an impressionist) reminds us of the lines of the patient in Michael Ondaatje's **The English Patient**

'Erase the family names Erase nations ... it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation,'³

Instead of the external wars discussed in **The English Patient** Hari Kunzru talks of the internal wars that takes place in the soul of a being who loses his basic identity though unfortunately. Hari Kunzru's post-colonial perspective reveals the

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problematics of history, identity, race, language, gender through the character of Pran Nath, who stealthily denies origin, place and identity. It would be worthwhile to quote Jeanne Delbaere of Ondantjee:

“a new integrative paradigm is now emerging” which would overtake the “early post-colonialism with its sharp polarizations” by making a “hybridized sites of imaginative transformations”.⁴

The key areas of continuing concern along with the element of ‘hybridity’ in the new sense of the world’s growing migration. Here, I would conclude my paper with the views of Dennis Wolder which will more clearly and specifically explain the dilemma ahead of Pran Nath :“(the) Ideas of crossfertilization, of the potential richness of traffic between and across boundaries – racial, national and international- can return post-colonial theorizing to a more celebratory, evenliberatory made as a way simultaneously to acknowledge while continuing to resist the oppressions of past and present.”⁵

Conclusion

The paper posits that the repression, depression and dilemma involved in the process of

colonization and then in de-colonization affects the identity tremendously thus developing intricate complexities which subconsciously harms the personality to such a depth and extent that recovery seems a daydream.

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