

Aftermath of Decolonized Hegemony in Select Novels – A Socio Political Analysis

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Abstract

The impact of colonization and the caste system on marginalized individuals in postcolonial India is complex and ongoing. The novels *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga and *Serious Men* by Manu Joseph offer insightful perspectives into the ethical challenges faced by those who are denied access to power and resources. Despite the end of colonial rule, the caste system has persisted, perpetuating inequality and denying opportunities to those who are considered lower castes. Oppression in India was not solely due to colonization. The 'Varna Shastras' also played a significant role in dividing Indian society into four categories: Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vysyas, and Shudras. In this system, knowledge, education, power, and economic opportunities were predominantly reserved for the first category of people. The Kings shared power with the Shatriyas, and the traders with the Vysyas. Unfortunately, the last group was completely excluded from these benefits. This paper aims to explore the impact of decolonization on this hierarchical system in India and the ongoing struggles of marginalized individuals to overcome the challenges they face in their daily lives.

Keywords: Decolonization, hegemony, manipulation, multi-ethnicity, subversion.

Introduction

Any marginalized person is very conscious about his/ her status in the periphery, especially in a postcolonial society like India. Contemporary literary discourse in English depicts this marginality in terms of culture and economy. Marginalized peoples, like all others, strive to establish their identity in the society through equality and well-being. They aim at upward mobility, nevertheless, the development need not necessarily be ethical, instead it focuses on financial growth thereby the development itself may become ironic according to natural human standards. The reputed awards as in the case of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Manu Joseph's *Serious Men* identify this pertinent change in behavior. Though every individual aspires to reach a self-sufficient status in terms of economy, power is also an important factor after the deliberations of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Both the selected writers consciously and carefully depict the current complexities of human life and the writings raise from marginalized voices and the marginalized through magnifying lens.

In a multi-ethnic land like India where there are so many religions, as well as major socio-economic and gender gaps, almost everyone, in one context or the other, may experience marginalization. When the marginalized write their lives, they document their current status in the society and trace their past as well. India, a multi-ethnic country, has its own previously constructed caste system in which there was only one upper caste and the others were layered one inside the other in a determined hierarchy. India consists of different religions due to various periods of invasion and colonization. In addition to this, economy and power was not shared to all due to hierarchy established through the *Laws of Manu*, which was originally rendered in Sanskrit in between 2nd Century BCE and 3rd Century CE. This created two major divisions based on economy, those who have and those who do not have.

The marginalized not only document their identity in the society but they demonstrate their strength and their originality. Their writing is a defense to their life and status. They never hesitate to display the contemporary reality in the globalized multi-ethnic world. Most importantly, when they narrate their own stories it sprouts with empathy and it is a celebration of their life instead of deploring for the deficits.

As demonstrated in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Manu Joseph's *Serious Men*, the upward mobility of marginalized groups has taken a dangerous turn towards manipulation. Written in their secondary or tertiary languages to address global audiences these novels utilize colonial discourse to dismantle hierarchical systems and provide power to marginalized groups.

The novels explore behavioral transformation to reveal how power functions in contemporary society. Adiga and Joseph through their written works prompt readers to analyze both the outcomes of upward social mobility and the potential of language as a tool for resistance and liberation.

The selected novels analyze the complex social and economic dynamics that shape postcolonial India. The country's modern social landscape is shaped by multiple factors because it contains a diverse population made up of various ethnic groups, cultures and religious beliefs. The condition of the economy stands out as a key factor because agriculture remains a dominant occupation. Though multi-national corporations (MNCs) initially pledged to create numerous jobs and support GDP expansion their practices result in low-cost labor and high production rather than growth. Efforts such as demonetization, designed to flush out black money, have sometimes failed. Most recently, the pandemic of COVID-19 has knocked the world economy off course, worsening India's existing issues. Also, the war between Iran and Russia has pushed the cost of living in areas such as food and oil. On this backdrop of economic adversity, the discussion is centered on how marginalized communities are represented and how they have struggled.

The White Tiger

It is remarkable how books are able to expose societal problems, including gender roles and cultural conflict. The White Tiger shows the plight of social mobility and yearning to get out of poverty through Balram's life story. The clash between Ashok, Balram's master and his wife Pinky, who is an American, reveals the conflict between the old and the new values and the issues encountered by couples from different cultures. There is a need to acknowledge and respect one another's values and beliefs, as well as try to use open communication and compromise. In this situation, it might have been helpful for Ashok's family to listen to Pinky's view and try to come up with a solution that satisfied everyone. There is a need to ensure there is a safe and caring environment in families where all the members feel heard and respected.

It is widely thought that an American wife and an Indian husband cannot live together, so the majority of Indian bridegrooms opt for brides who are Indian. Ashok did not do so, but he fell for an American woman. When she got drunk and ran over someone with their car, Ashok's father and brother tried to blame Balram for the accident. Lucky for Balram, as nobody had reported a missing person, he escaped getting falsely accused. This unfortunate incident

highlights the precarious situation that those who are marginalized often face in the hands of the privileged.

Corruption has become a pervasive force in postmodern Indian society, influencing the actions of individuals from all walks of life. For example, Ayyan Mani was able to bribe a reporter from a Marathi daily called *Yug* to make his son appear to be a child prodigy. Similarly, in *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai killed his master Ashok, who was carrying bribe money intended for a minister who allowed coal to be taken from mines without paying taxes. Balram learned to grow at the expense of others by emulating his master's corrupt behavior, which ultimately led him to subvert the dominance of master over servant. In order to conceal his identity as a murderer, Balram bribed the police in Bangalore and assumed a new identity as Mr. Ashok Sharma - The White Tiger. Sunita Sinha (2010) writes in *Indian Booker Prize Winners: A Critical Study of Their Works* that Adiga presents the “voice of the colossal underclass” (xv), the underclass that is capable of bringing oppressed feeling and status of economic deprivation of underprivileged class turns out to be more dangerous.

Throughout his entire life, Balram had been victimized. In his young age, his grandmother Kusum sold him to a Stark, a wealthy man from whom she borrowed money for a marriage, but she could not repay. From this incident onwards, he developed a bitter feeling against his granny. Gradually, he witnessed a few more annoyances with women as his master Ashok's wife Pinky abandoned him forever. As a result, he excluded women in his economic progress and remained unmarried until the very end. His sexual needs were met by seeking women who sold their bodies for money.

Serious Men

On the other hand, the Portrayal of the Marginalized and the Power of Manipulation in *Serious Men* offers a unique perspective on the underprivileged and their experiences with manipulation. Rather than emphasizing hard work and dedication, the protagonist Ayyan bribes a reporter to make his son Adi famous overnight. Ayyan, originally a Hindu, converted to Buddhism and ultimately to the cause of the Dalits. Adi, on the other hand, aspires to be identified as clever rather than in economic or social terms. Such seeking of an alternative identity generates havoc and communal unrest, in addition to the condemnation of the outcast and how they are manipulative. Despite the controversial themes, *Serious Men* and *The White Tiger* have received national and international acclaim for the universality of narrativity.

Manu Joseph also chronicled manipulation of a marginalized person in his own upward mobility. Ayyan, a Dalit person, was enabled to progress via access to education, employment,

and a salary, to have a wife and son in the book *Serious Men*. His own narrative about his findings is narrated through story from an outsiders perspective, someone who has never lived through such events but has observed the occurrence of his own society. Though the insider narratives tend to portray subversion within the stories as in Kalpana Swaminathan's *Venus Crossing*, the outsider narratives identify manipulation, another aspect of truth. The novel brings into perspective the endemic social inequalities and discrimination against the lower castes in India. It is an emotive description of the life of the suppressed communities who had been oppressed and discriminated upon for centuries. By describing the characters that appear through the text, the author pinpoints the complexity of caste relations and the plight of those trying to break out of the cycle of caste prejudice. There lies her critique of the power of education/affirmative action to uplift the marginalized groups that move into the democratic process with a voice. The novel itself serves as a close examination at what it truly means to live in a world woven with so much casteism, forced to put on a smile for society while facing abundant suffering privately at home, and ultimately, it is a poignant call to action for the reader to address their own blind spots and unexamined beliefs.

In Manu Joseph's novel, *Ayyan Mani* is emblematic of the backward world's tragedies in the current generation. The novel also draws attention to both manipulations and complacency within intellectual circles and the impact of that complacency on society at large. Armed with his satirical eyes, Joseph strips the shallow veneers that are the by-products of the irresponsible acts of persons in authority and spheres of influence. She was Alok Shukla, a servant and worker, and no one was stuck in the vicious cycle of vulnerability and exploitation that has come to define so much of society as *Ayyan Mani*, a semi-political, semi-vulnerable, and human character.

Serious Men, astutely utilizes contrasting characteristics to show different views of the same object or situation. Joseph, for instance, juxtaposes the 'flowers on the conjugal bed' with the 'funeral roses' to emphasize the elision between the two. In India, signs like 'rose' and 'milk' are associated with both beginnings, such as birth, and endings, such as death. This plurality of signification constructed by mankind is accepted without deviation and is depicted in the novel. Additionally, the characters *Ayyan Mani* and *Acharya* are juxtaposed as opposite characters. While *Ayyan Mani* is highlighted in the first half of the novel, *Acharya* finds prominence in the second half. Their qualities are also placed in contrast, such as marginalized versus dominant, cunning versus innocent and peon versus professor. Best and Kellner argue that Kierkegaard believes a negatively unifying principle has replaced the positive forces of the past. Their research suggests that "... those

lacking in talent and resources want to tear down those who have them" (Best and Kellner 2017, 3). This leads to vindictiveness and not the kind of revolt proposed by Nietzsche, which stems from anger towards former oppressors. Communities that have been exploited often rise up against their oppressors. This was seen during and after the Second World War when nations fought for their freedom from British colonialism. After India gained independence, legal reforms were introduced to support oppressed communities to develop and prosper. Despite having access to education, employment, income, and opportunities for upward mobility, Ayyan Mani has chosen manipulative tactics, which reflect his inability to create a space for himself.

Gender

These marginalized men like Ayyan Mani and *The White Tiger* do not include women in their upward mobility. Their counterparts are mere objects to satiate their physical urge. It's ironic that Oja Mani's contribution to their family's success is overlooked, while their son is given preferential treatment as a male child prodigy. However, men like Arvind Acharya in the novel *Serious Men* have evolved. They prioritize educating and empowering their daughters, and even send them abroad to enhance their social status. This highlights the shifting attitudes of contemporary men towards women's limitations. Acharya represents the transitional mindset of a male who adheres to traditional gender roles, yet engages in an extramarital affair and supports his wife's overseas education.

Gender plays an extensive role in how Power Dynamics are reflected in the novel. It's not just men who perpetuate gender stereotypes and imbalances of power; women can also play a part. In Manu Joseph's novel, character Oparna Goushmoulik, the head of the astrobiology department, desired an illicit relationship with her superior, Acharya, in hopes of gaining power, freedom, and protection. When she realized she had no control over him even after their physical relationship, she resorted to falsely accusing him of pressuring her to infect research samples, causing chaos at the Research Institute. While she herself held a marginalized status within patriarchal society (as a woman), she bent the situation to her will. It's funny that her self-discovery was bought at the expense of her matrimony and right to define her life the way she wanted. Oparna subverts the traditional roles of family life by striving to gain education and professional opportunities, highlighting the autonomy of the individual and the capacity for women to question patriarchal structures. On the other hand, Oja's lack of education and adherence to traditional roles are reflective of the systems of oppression that restrict women and reinforce inequality, both in the narrative and in the real world. This comparison

underscores the importance of providing education and empowering women to create more equitable societies that benefit all members.

Class

Serious Men outlines the negative consequences of higher education in promoting selfish individuals, class conflict and patriarchy. The main character, Ayyan Mani, is disillusioned by the irresponsible behavior of his educated colleagues who waste public funds on research. Additionally, the book reveals the revengeful nature of marginalized groups, who seek to overthrow their upper-caste oppressors. This creates instability and disrupts development in India. While racism is a global threat to tolerance, in India, the oppressed seek empowerment through education to subvert the oppressive system. Manu Joseph states in *The Guardian* (2010):

“Most Indian readers of literary fiction written in English are of a certain class, and one of the recreations of the Indian upper class is compassion for the poor. I think the poor in India are increasingly much empowered, and the time has come when the novel can portray them in a more realistic way. Ayyan is still an underdog but that is due to his circumstances, not due to his intellect or aspirations (n.p.)”.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* showcases the manipulation that arises from the conflict between the "haves" and "have-nots". In contrast, Manu Joseph has a different view on manipulation that requires special attention. Due to the reservation policies enforced by law, job opportunities are scarce for the upper-caste individuals. Joseph observes that this situation forces them to flee to non-vegetarian lands in search of work. The following lines by Manu Joseph sharply highlight this dilemma “The Brahmins had nowhere to go now but to suffer in silence or to flee to non-vegetarian lands” (Joseph 82). When marginalized communities are empowered, it's crucial to rectify manipulative behaviors.

Conclusion

To conclude, the selected novels not only carry a social concern but also act as a reflection of real-life issues. The authors can be seen as social reformers who use their narrative style to embody juxtaposition and irony with black humor. Through subversion, the marginalized aim for harmonious living, and the novels shed light on the challenges faced by women in balancing their personal and professional lives in the Indian context. The novels provide valuable insights into the complexities of society and encourage readers to think critically about important issues. In situations like Ayyan Mani and Balram Halwai, the marginalized people can create anarchy. Social scientists, though, are the ones who can repair this path of destruction. Doubly

marginalized people might not be able to imagine a peaceful life and so turn to avenging themselves. It is therefore crucial to utilize novels to bring into the open bad realities and contradictions, and to introduce alternative systems that facilitate reform and improvement. By way of increased readership, novels have the ability to inspire a reconsideration of prevailing social values, and in turn lead to a more just, peaceful, and prosperous society.

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