

Narrative of Domination in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract. Domination and exploitation are the basic features of colonial discourse. In fact colonialism operates through economic exploitation and political as well as psychological domination of the subject by the colonial master. A hegemonic structure is created that becomes the norm. The postcolonial society is not totally free from the residual impacts of the hegemonic structure of the colonizers. Although the political control is overthrown the psychic control continues in the form of a sense of awe for the manners and values of the colonizers. Most postcolonial societies suffer from the love-hate relation with the erstwhile masters. The narrative of domination continues invisibly. The present paper tries to show this narrative of domination and the protest against the colonial hegemony present in the society depicted in the two novels i.e. *The White Tiger* and *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Keywords : Post colonialism; hegemony; domination; protest; subaltern.

Domination and protest against domination are the two essential elements of the discourse of post colonialism. Most post colonial texts are a document of creative protest against the hegemonic structure of domination. The idea of the subaltern that forms part of the discourse of post colonialism is nothing else but the idea of protest against the narrative of domination. The subaltern is regarded as the voice from the margin. The subaltern has come to symbolise description and distortion of indigenous, history, value and polity in the wake of external conquest, colonization and prominence given to westernization at the expense of indigenous moves. The study of the subaltern investigates social transformations and enquires into how and why some groups developed into elite classes who control resources and perpetuate stereotypes.

Postcolonial writers have portrayed the hegemonic domination of the elite class and the denial of access to the deprived class in the hegemonic superstructure. In the social structure the elite class holds control of the power, resources, law ethics and values. In fact this class manufactures its value system and deprives the proletariat class without any say in it. It controls the language and history and culture. Consequently a large section of the society is treated as 'peripheral' and 'other'.

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. (IJES, Vol XLV, 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, 47) 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. Postcolonial writings accentuate the exposition of certain elementary oppressive structure in class, gender and caste. (Rana, Vol. 11. No.1, March, 2012, 52)

Colonialism is not just a political economic system but a hegemonic superstructure that operates through marginalization, exclusion, oppression, dislocation and disaffiliation. Colonialism is accompanied by exploitation, annexation and conquest. Its hegemonic power rests on creating the binary opposition of self/other, white/black, good/evil, and superior/inferior and so on. Postcolonial literature tries to represent the marginalized and the suppressed. It explores the narrative of domination in the socio-cultural structure. It is not a straightforward answer but ‘a way of thinking through critical strategies’. It is a ‘multifaceted and open process of interrogation and critique’. (Hiddleston, 4)

The question of domination is the core issue of the two novels under consideration i.e. *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai. The two novels have been published in the backdrop of globalization and liberalization. Indian society after seven decades of independence in 1947 was still suffering from the colonial hangover. Meanwhile the spread of the effects of globalization started to cast its effects on the Indian society. A new narrative of capitalist domination was gradually created. Neocolonial forces started to affect the psyche of the people. The people of the society suffered what is called colonial neurosis. The feudal masters got transformed into newly emerged crony capitalists. Urbanization disturbed the agro-economy and the traditional village life. On the international front America replaced Britain as a centre of neocolonialism. The multicultural value of the US could not stop the exploitation of the people coming from poor countries. So, whereas America became a dreamland of the people of the poor countries, the actual experience of the poor people migrated to America was horrible.

Aravind Adiga’s debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008) is a tale of protest against the hegemonic superstructure of domination. It is a narrative of the class struggle, the struggle between the big bellies and the small bellies. The big- bellies or the bourgeoisie rule over the small- bellies or the proletariats. They do so not only by coercion but also by manufactured consent. It shows the struggle between the rich and the poor; and the master and the slave. The masters create a system that becomes difficult to be broken by servants.

In the novel Aravind Adiga uses the 'Rooster Coop' as the metaphor of the hegemony – the structure or set of ideas by means of which dominant groups strive to secure the consent of the subordinate groups to their leadership or voluntary service. The protagonist of the novel Balram Halwai – the white tiger, strives to break the rooster coop throughout the novel. For breaking it Balram Halwai joins the struggle between master and slave and wants to experience what 'it means not to be a servant' (*The White Tiger*, 321). He struggles hard to come out of the world of Darkness to the world of Light. The novel depicts the contrast between the world of Light and the world of Darkness. It shows the mechanism of the poor-rich divide, and the structure of exploitation.

Aravind Adiga calls the novel 'The Autobiography of half-baked Indians'. It also shows how in the neo-liberal India, in spite of all the thrust on entrepreneurship, the delicate mechanism of exploitation has remained. In India the hangover of colonialism has remained intact. The protagonist of the novel moves from his village Laxmangarh to Dhanbad to Delhi and at last to Bangalore, the city of entrepreneurs, but everywhere he sees two classes of people – the masters and the servants. Throughout the novel we can see the struggle of Balram Halwai against the hegemonic structure created by the masters.

The mechanism of domination and slavery imposed by the powerful masters has been neatly symbolized by the metaphor of rooster coop in the novel. It becomes the recurring image in the novel. It symbolizes voluntary acceptance of slavery. Adiga elaborates:

The greatest thing to come out of this country in ten thousand years of history is the Rooster Coop. Go to Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chicken there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters, stuffed tightly into wire mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, packing at each other, jostling just for space; the whole cage giving a horrible stench – the stench of terrified feather flesh. On the wooden desk above the coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brother lying around them. They know they are the next, yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country (173-174).

According to Balram Halwai 99.9 percent of Indians are in the rooster coop, they do not rebel. This rooster coop is the result of perpetual training. It is like a conditioning that makes the weak consent to the design of the powerful. It is this conditioning that makes a handful of people control the majority. Balram says:

Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That's because we have the coop. (175)

He further says:

A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent – as strong, talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse. (175)

Balram feels that the masters meticulously condition the servants. The desire to be servant is penetrated into their psyche so that they voluntarily accept their servitude. He says that whenever he saw the feet of his master Ashok, he felt an urge to press them even without being asked to do so. This is so because the desire to be a servant had been bred into him: hammered into his skull, nail after and poured into his blood. (193) Such is his helplessness that he is unable to refuse even when he is forced to take the responsibility of a killing that he had not done. He says, 'I was trapped in the Rooster Coop' (177).

Adiga talks about two kinds of people: the Big Belly and the Small Belly. The former controls the hegemony or the social common sense. The Big Bellies are the masters whereas the small Bellies are the slaves. The two classes of people have two different destinies: eat or get eaten up. (64) Balram tries to decode the narrative of domination. He suffers poverty, humiliation and exploitation. He observes the lavish life style of his master. He decides to shed the image of the country mouse and take up the image of *The White Tiger*. When he is forced to own the responsibility of killing a person with his car in an accident which was committed by the wife of his master he won over the moral dilemma. He felt how completely he was owned by his master – 'body, mind and arse'. He decides to kill his master Ashok and run away and finally take his name.

Balram suffers along with his family a long period of domination and miserable condition. He is the son of a rickshaw puller born in a dark corner of India. He suffers the humiliation meted out by the feudal masters. His father dies due to the lack of proper medical facilities. He learns driving and gets appointed as a chauffeur by his master Ashok who is rich, educated and an important person of the society. Balram and Ashok are the two products of the same soil of Laxmangarh, Adiga writes:

How could two such contrasting specimens of
humanity be produced by the same soil, sunlight
and water ? (80)

The White Tiger most unequivocally depicts the status of the subaltern in a postcolonial society. It shows the struggle for emancipation from the age-old slavery and exploitation. Balram is a typical subaltern – deprived, exploited, humiliated. He is a strong voice of the underclass. He is the king of darkness characterized by corrupt politics and bureaucracy, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste, superstition, social taboos, evils of feudalism and zamindari, breaking down of education and health services and faulty police and judicial functioning. These forces collectively operate to perpetuate the subaltern class.

The novel depicts the state of domination in Bharat and India. On the one hand it shows the dark world with its poverty, disease, feudalism, caste and all that, on the other hand it shows the world of light with wealth, power, education, technology and the new cult of entrepreneurship. In the world of light success is achieved through manipulation, malpractices, opportunism and bribery. The new India is an example of crony capitalism. Both the rural and urban societies of India are corrupt and rotten. The novel depicts an India that is riddled with bribery, corrupt rotting, practices, dirty social milieu, caste, superstition, hunger, disease, exploitation, evils of feudalism, Naxalism, unemployment, prostitution, mockery of education system. Balram is humiliated and insulted by his master even though he is so loyal and sincere. So, he decides to revolt. Balram is unlike the typical hero who fights injustice with the arms of morality – he takes recourse to immoral means.

The condition of the poor people is not very different in the cities also. There too they live “under the huge bridges, overpasses, making fires and washing”. (120) On the contrary the rich people enjoy a luxurious life even though they do nothing and are morally corrupt. They bribe politicians and steal income tax. They live in air conditioned flats and travel in air-conditioned cars – and spend carelessly in malls. Their lust for money makes them dishonest, immoral and highly selfish. There is a nexus between the rich and the politicians who are scheming and corrupt criminals. The Great socialist character in the novel is said “to have embezzled one billion rupees from Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe, full of white people and black money”. (97-98)

The Inheritance of Loss (2006) is a very carefully crafted novel focusing on a number of issues of contemporary relevance. But above all it shows various faces of subalternity and shades of domination. It depicts poverty and deprivation on the one hand and class snobbery on the other. On a higher plane the novel is about the great American dream, effects of globalization, economic disparity between nations and classes and the ill effects of consumer driven multiculturalism.

This novel brings forth the ambiguity of post colonialism and throws light on the socio-economic inequality and domination and subjugation of the marginalized. It shows both physical and psychological domination.

Throughout the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* the idea of domination of various types can be seen scattered. The judge Jemubhai Patel suffers a psychological domination. He has a strange sense of awe and appreciation in his psyche for the British colonial masters so much so that it has an abnormal personality trying to behave like the British. He acts as a colonial surrogate. His conduct with Pannalal, the cook Nimi (his wife) and Gyan (the tutor of Sai) is symptomatic of dominance. He suffers from colonial neurosis. Even though he had suffered so much insult and humiliation by the British people during his study period in England, he finds himself unable to accommodate himself to the Indian soil. He becomes a white man in black skin. He is symbol of colonial domination of the psycho of the colonized. According to Rai, "Jemubhai is Frantz fanon's French educated colonials depicted in *Black Skin White Masks*. He is one of the 'mimic' men who learnt to act English'. (IJES, 140) On his return to India he finds himself despising everything Indian and he considers himself far superior to the hard working poverty stricken Indian people. He was Indian in blood but English in manners and opinions. He was the man with the white curly wig and dark face covered in powder, bringing down his hammer always against the native in a world that was still colonial. Jemubhai Patel is an example of the effect of colonialism. He is utterly anglicized. He suffers a cultural domination. When he entered Cho Oyu (the house) he had felt that he was entering a sensibility could live here in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country. (*The Inheritance of Loss* 29) For Jemubhai "cake was better than laddoos, fork-spoon, knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a water of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi. (30)

The idea of domination can be found in Jemubhai's relation with his wife Nimi. His wife becomes a victim of the schizophrenic personality caused due to be a colonized psyche. She is mercilessly beaten and ignored. When she uses the powder puff of her husband he loses his cool and beats her like anything. In the second incident when she joins the procession that welcomes Nehru, he expels her from his home forever. She gives birth to a baby. Later on she has to commit suicide. Jemu has stolen Nimi's dignity, shamed his family, shamed hers, turned her into an embodiment of their humiliation (308). This conduct of the judge is an example of patriarchal dominance.

Like Jemubhai, Sai is also colonized in her psyche. She is a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns – in a sensibility that regards the west as superior and the East as inferior. This very idea of the inferiority of culture of the colonized people forms the crux of the colonial value as it justifies colonialism as an enterprise of civilizing the colonized Gyan, the lover of Sai who protests against this mentality.

He says:

“Don’t you have any pride? Trying to be westernized. They don’t want you!!! Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then they won’t want you (174).

Gyan reacts to Sai’s celebration of Christmas very vehemently:

You are slaves, that’s what you are, running after the west, embarrassing yourselves (163).

Pannalal, the cook also bears the cultural dominance in his mind. His psyche is also a slave of the west. He feels disappointed to be working for Jemubhai. He regards it a severed comedown from his father "who served only white men". (63). He feels a sense of pride that his son Biju has gone to America and is cooking English food and "he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian food". (17) He feels a triumphant glory and pride over his son’s working in New York. He boasted to everyone he met, "He is the manager of the restaurant business". (84)

Biju is the worst sufferer of the colonial dominance. He manages to go to New York, the dreamland of the globalized world with much effort. He was ready to face all kinds of humiliations in order to reach there. As he gets the visa for going to America a man in the room exclaims, "you are the luckiest man in the world". (77) When Biju reaches America he writes to his father, "Angreji Khana only, no Indian food, and the owner is not from India. He is from America itself (140) The fact was that Biju had to work in the basement kitchen in restaurant in a very humiliating condition. Yet he has a very stronger love-hate relation with his white colonial master. Kiran Desai writes:

Biju couldn’t help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn’t have forgiven his father for not trying to send him either"(82).

With his colonized psyche Biju fails to understand the love-hate relationship with his white master. Desai writes :

Why do you want it if you have it here? Odissa had said angrily to Achootan when he had asked for sponsorship. Well he wanted it. Everyone wanted it whether you liked it or hated it. The more you hated if, sometimes the more you wanted it. This they didn’t understand (135).

The narrative of domination does not include material deprivation and cultural exclusion only, it includes a psychological subordination also. This subordination helps in accepting the hegemony as a norm and stops any protest. It develops a syndrome of love for the prison and the prisoner. It causes a kind of self-imposed captivity, and a strange love for the master. A tendency of copying the master is developed so much so that the slave tries to identify with the master. In both the novels the characters hate their masters, yet they want to identify with them and copy them demonstrating their dominated psyche. This is true about both Balram and Jemubhai.

Thus the two novels depict the hegemonic structure present in the postcolonial society and the neatly crafted narrative of domination both in terms of the material world and the inner psyche. The novels clearly establish that the postcolonial society in India is not free from the signs of neocolonialism and crony capitalism.

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