

EXAMINING THE CONCEPT OF THE ‘OTHER’-AN OCCIDENTAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

India stands suffused with myriad cultural and philosophical manifestations that form the tapestry of this great pluralistic nation. The Constitution endeavors to preserve this aspect of the state which lends itself to this unique flavor. But unfortunately, individuals are often seen struggling in the cultural, communistic and religious domain which often tends to bracket itself into walled in spaces. Articulation of plurality with the single political order is superficial, often leading to chaos. Exclusion politics has turned out to be a necessity for a cohesive democratic society in the postcolonial setup. Social exploitation is an inherent aspect of the society which is still seized in the throes of metamorphosis into a progressive entity. Imperialism has crushed the psyche of the people to such an extent that even after seventy-odd years of independent rule, we have not yet been able to shake off the shackles of colonial rule—we still suffer the hangover of servitude and psychological inferiority that is now translated into nepotism and an exaggerated and distorted sense of importance. Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger" has exposed the decaying state of society where people are caught up in the web of birth and circumstances and their emancipation purely relying not on their potential but in their contexts of birth. It represents the sad reality of India submerged in economic inequality, and an arduous political, social set up for the less powerful and underprivileged sections of society. This paper is an attempt to analyze the concept of freedom and individuality in the post-colonial milieu of the Indian Society and unravel the white lies of constitutional rights and autonomy through the perpetuation of the other—so as to justify and sanctify explicit exploitation of humanity.

KEYWORDS: Pluralistic Society, Autonomy, Exploitation, Imperialism, Post-Colonial Milieu, Other

INTRODUCTION

“Social identities are relational; groups typically define themselves in relation to others. This is because identity has little meaning without the “other”. So, by defining itself a group defines others. Identity is rarely claimed or assigned for its own sake. These definitions of self and others have purposed and consequences. They are tied to rewards and punishment, which may be material or symbolic. There is usually an expectation of gain or loss as a consequence of identity claims. This is why identities are contested. Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both self and the other, the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities.” (Andrew Okolie, 2003: 2)

The 'Other' is "perceived as lacking essential characteristics possessed by the group, the 'other' is almost always seen as lesser or inferior being and is treated accordingly" (*The Other*, 2009).

The topic of otherness has always been a crucial element of analysis in society about how major and minor classes are able to identify themselves. In this context, the society is controlled by the group that possesses greater political power. The concept of 'other' is universal with various aspects falling under the category of 'other' according to contexts. Human beings have always been 'othered' and anybody without essential characteristics of a group would be regarded socially lesser. Zygmunt Bauman states that otherness is the key aspect of any society for establishing an identity and he sums up thus: "In dichotomies crucial to the practice and the vision of social order the differentiating power hides as a rule behind one of the members of the opposition. The second member is but the other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation. This abnormality is the other of the norm... woman the other of man, stranger the other of the native, enemy the other of friend, "them" the other of "us"..."

'Ascribed Status' is the position that leashes its authority on people from birth. These imposed positions of rigid social order stay fixed in determining individual's position all through their lives contributing to both hopeful and denial stereotypes. A person born into an affluent family is always well regarded, designated superior status as a result of their social position and links. Besides gender, religion, caste, class, etc. is also contributory in assigning status in society. On the other hand, 'Achieved Status' refers to the position that is earned through respect, profession based on individual talent or skill. These social statuses authoritatively designate upon the mindsets of people in creating despise about fellow equal creatures. From here arises the concept of 'we' and 'other' which hinders societal growth.

UNIQUENESS OF CREATION

The beauty of creation lies in its uniqueness. No human being is alike and every individual deserves a room for his/her own self and to possess an identity. Irrespective of the social or political position, any individual must be well treated and accepted as one among all. Dr. B R Ambedkar once remarks that- "Unlike a drop of water, which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self." But the independent life and individuality of man is shackled because of the unethical social order of 'other'.

The situation is an already corrupt system, aggravated with the advent of western colonizer. They always wanted to create a larger gulf between indigenous people, which was achieved through 'divide and rule'. Hence all the activities advantageous to the colonized were also exploited in deception. The feelings of Malcolm Muggeridge, an English author and satirist add evidence to this argument when he says- "As I dimly realized, a people can be laid waste carefully as well as physically, not their lands but their inner life, as it were, sewn with salt. This is what happened to India. An alien culture, itself exhausted, become their inner life, and shallow, was imposed upon them; when we went, we left behind railways, schools and universities, statues of Victoria and other of our worthies, industries, an administration, a legal system; all that and much more, but set in a spiritual wasteland. We had drained the country of its true life and creativity, making of it a place of echoes and mimicry."

Colonialists could set their strong feet in the land of vast culture and superior life only because they succeeded in dividing the people. The current political and social outline is a mere reflection of the British game plan. They succeed in

weighing down equality through 'othernesses. History is an evidence to struggle for equality and individual identity. In spite of complete sovereignty won, establishing society free of discriminations, inequality seems to be a mirage. At every stage there is differentiation created between people in terms of economic, social, political, ethical base.

The postcolonial urge for freedom from the shadows of the colonizer is crushed with harsh realities and narrow mindsets of people. The roots of creating a chasm between the locals are so deeply rooted in the hearts of people that, even the generations to come can also be affected. Offspring of colonial rule is not restricted to the dawn of neocolonialism alone, but has conceived several ill effects which people suffer from both within and outside. Renowned writer Arundhati Roy thus says: "As for the third Official Reason: exposing Western Hypocrisy-how much more exposed can they be? Which decent human being on earth harbors any illusions about it? These are people whose histories are spongy with the blood of others. Colonialism, apartheid, slavery, ethnic cleansing, germ warfare, chemical weapons-they virtually invented it all."

NEO-COLONIAL MANIFESTATIONS

Effects of colonization never ceased after obtaining independence. The British succeeded in operating the prevailing caste system in India to achieve their desire to colonize them, which has now become an inseparable part of Indian polity, economy and society. Aspects of religion, gender, class in broad are creating differences between people in our society. Ascribed status still remains to be the core of ideas of separation and differentiation in Indian scenario.

The mind of the subaltern is molded to operate on the belief that they belong to inferior rank and are useless in making any contributions to society. Colonizer always marked to be superior over them. Dichotomy on large zone arises from here. The lifeblood of postcolonial literature, to question on the concepts of westernization which is seen synonymous to develop for the orientalist- once a colonized. In simple terms, westerner has become a yardstick of measurement of progress of society which is no more a colony. Any mark of development is evaluated in comparison to the west, especially the European.

Postcolonialism seems to be a state of deprived freedom from the infections of the imperialist forces. External and internal independence that these liberated states enjoy today, appear to be the continuation of the drama which was initiated by the colonizer. The hegemony of 'otherness' persists in spite of several political, social reforms sought. Aravind Adiga in his work "The White Tiger" brilliantly elucidates separateness prevalent in India due to political and social malevolence and malfeasance. Difference or otherness have become so compelling themes in the idea of representation in any society in which category India appears to be a major one.

Colonialism always had a definite game plan at every stage. In the name of civilizing the east, the colonizer laid indelible footprints of his culture on the colonized. *Walia* thus describes this dodgy game plan: "Colonialism is accompanied by exploration, 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." This continues to operate in the 21st century Indian society where dichotomies exist at every stage of life.

The idea of 'otherness' begins from birth, especially in the Indian set up. The social gelling, togetherness is suppressed in our minds. Education about status, position, difference in our society commences as early as during infancy. It is no wonder to see otherness 'within' and 'outside'. Furthermore, the basic instinct of human beings to differentiate, and giving meaning is in heights among us. Adiga's novel opens up this oppressive reality through several characters.

Dichotomies of otherness have become a part and parcel of society. The hierarchy of our society into superior and inferior is the basic hurdle for achieving equality and individual identity. Comparing and contrasting equal creatures of nature are imbibed deeply in the minds of people. Uniqueness are often seen as a means of marginalizing people citing inefficiency to be the part of accepted group. Comparing and demarcating people into several groups of oppositions is unethical in the cross-cultural set up especially. D H Lawrence thus opines about uniqueness: *“When each thing is unique in itself, there can be no comparison made. There is only this strange recognition of present otherness.”*

THE WHITE TIGER AND IMPERIALISTIC IDEOLOGIES

The status of superiority and differentiation in Indian society arises from the time where the elite Indians aspired to be identified with their white masters. We have enough references to state the shadow of European master guarding the line of differentiation since colonial time till date. In the novel “The White Tiger” we notice several examples for this. The idea of slave and master existing in our society deeply rooted is a white man’s imitation by Indian elite. Thousands of servants responding to the needs of their masters suppressing their inner self are a witness to differentiate which exists. Poverty, economic dependency often leads people to this state. Here, in the novel, Balram Halwai and many servants like being the sufferers due to insensitive and inhuman masters. One instance from the novel where Balram massages the feet of Stork (Ashok’s father) where he is expected to clean the dead skin and hair floating on water with bare hands. Any person’s mind is squeezed while doing such works. Balram’s remarks prove it when he says: “I washed my hands for ten minutes, and dried them, and washed them again, but it made no difference. No matter how much you wash your hands after you have massaged a man’s foot, the smell of his old, flaky skin will stay on your skin for an entire day.” (pp. 72)

“Capitalist exploitation and cartels and monopolies are the enemies of underdeveloped countries. On the other hand a regime which is completely oriented towards the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions, will allow us to go forward more quickly and more harmoniously, and thus make impossible that caricature of society where all economics and political power is held in the hands of a few who regard the nation as a whole with scorn and contempt.” (Frantz Fanon)

Powerful elite decrees to the majority. Democracy or people’s power is a high drama enacted in reality! Equal division of power, rights and duties are golden words restricted to documents alone. Powerless and common folk of the nation is regarded as fellow beings only during the time of election. Otherwise, they are treated worse than beasts. The value of a person is established only because of his right to vote! Balram’s enrollment to the voter’s list during the time of election, and the white tiger’s sarcastic remark about his birthday unveil the voiceless nature of the largest majority. Villages deprived of fundamental amenities, existing in sub-human state contrasted with elite villas and bungalows is the picture of democratic reality in India.

Imposter’s technique of “divide and rule” continues its operation in the largest democracy. “Otherness’ is the key of operation for this. White man’s successful creation of the new elite is the poison fed to the colonized blood. In the preface to “*The Wretched of the Earth*”, Sartre says: *“The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked on promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture; they stuffed their mouth full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed.”* This new elite continues its identity with British manners and the ideas on controlling people too is based on colonizer’s ways. In this novel, the idea of making differences and achieving their

selfish motifs is achieved by operating the colonizer's brain. Particularly the situation in government hospital where Vikram Halwai breathed his last in the quintessence of this. Though the peons, attenders, servants are the part of bourgeois, they still exploit fellow citizens of same social and financial strata. We must here notice that these trifle workers are controlled by the powerful authority with false temptation like the westerner did to the Indians during colonial times.

Consumerist and capitalist world is deprived of minimum humanity and consideration towards fellow being. Being in the state of selfishness, the powerful group always regards their comfort to be satisfied first. In fact, materialistic comforts are valued more than human beings here. One instance that draws tears to the eyes of any sensitive reader is that of Ram Persad's remark to Balram about the Pomeranian dogs when he says that, "*they are more worthy than you*". It is evident that the differentiation in society has crossed the threshold where animals are treated way better than people, especially the poor.

"In the ordinary jumble of my literary drawer, I sometimes find the texts I wrote ten, fifteen, or even more years ago. And many of them seem to me written by a stranger: I simply do not recognize myself in them. There was a person who wrote them, and it was I. I experienced them, but it was in another life, from which I just woke up, as if from someone else's dream." (Fernando Pessoa, "The Book of Disquiet")

Change is the essence of life. We tend to change, improvise, and worsen at different stages of life. Life is in flux, no position remains to be static at any point of time. But the status of persons born inferior remains to be same for generations. Especially in the scenario of otherness and differentiation, only power operates as an authority. Anybody without power, social links, is never treated to be equal amongst others. The lives of people of Lakshmangarh are an example of this. Four generations together, they continue to be loyal servants to somebody else; never possessing an individual identity.

The social hierarchy is dictating over the lives of people, especially those who are marginalized. Privacy right, individual choice, right to life, etc. is always dreaming for the majority. In the stupor of possessing power, the elite exploits the inferior people in many ways. One is through economic benefits, where money is the sole means of survival. Any human being can go to any extent for the sake of a platter of food. We can even accept for the fact that the women's silence over the objectification of their bodies for sexual gratification is an instance of this hegemony. Deprived of the fundamental benefits like food, cloth and shelter, women take up to professions like prostitution, which can be regarded as the creation of the powerful people. The pain of that social outcast is the pleasure of the other insensitive superior people

Description about the anxiety, pain in the eyes of whores in the novel reflects the status of women, who are discriminated twice. One for their status and the other being their gender. Dichotomy in terms of gender is not exceptional for elite women even. Pinky is always despised by her family in spite of being rich, beautiful and bold. This is a feed for thought about failure in looking into others' lives in order to understand them.

"We are separated from one another by an unbridgeable gulf of otherness and strangeness which resists all our attempts to overcome it by means of natural association or emotional or spiritual union. There is no way from one person to another. However loving and sympathetic we try to be, however sound our psychology, however frank our and open our behavior we cannot penetrate the incognito of the other man, for there are no direct relationships, not even between soul and soul. Christ stands between us, and we can only get into touch with our neighbors through Him." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Sometimes the chasm between people is so huge that it appears to be irreparable. Never will any of us try to comprehend the mindset of others who are also equal creations of God. The intruding nature of superior class in the personal sphere of their subordinates reflects their nature towards them. It is important to note that these people forget to realize that the poor and proletariat are also human beings! Mukhesh's reaction to the letter from Balram's grandmother explains to the readers about how ill a master thinks about the nature and characteristics of his servant. Mukhesh's denial in allowing Balram to read the letter in privy is an instance of this when he thus reply's to his brother: "He won't mind a thing like this. He has no sense of privacy. In the villages there are no separate rooms so they just lie together at night and fuck like that. Trust me, he doesn't mind." It is realized from these derogatory remarks the master's insensitivity and air of superiority towards the marginalized.

"When we are looking for the unexpected, we are not looking for the unexpected in ourselves, but we are also curious about the unexpected in the behavior of others. So as to know the others, we have to learn how and where they differ from us. By understanding this, we are able to establish an uplifting link with otherness." (Erik Peevernie, "Looking for the unexpected")

Stuart Hall in his book "*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*" asks why differences and otherness are such compelling themes in popular representation, particularly in images. Hall extends the idea of difference into type and stereotype. He refers to Richard Dyer's belief that we use *types* to make sense of the world and place people, objects and events into certain categories, according to our value and belief systems. He suggests that we also use people's roles, demographics, personalities to help group them in this way. The *stereotype is arrived at by taking these typical characteristics and then reducing the person to that set of traits and finally exaggerating them.* (Otherness: Photography critiques. 2013/01)

Differences and otherness is not always restricted from outside, but operates within the same sphere of equals as well. To simplify, our society experiences the idea of "otherness" within bourgeois too. The proletariat and the middle class experience satisfaction by differentiating within themselves. There is a superiority complex running down amidst the high and low level servants. One of the interesting observations from the novel is this 'otherness' existing within the bourgeois themselves, an imitation of the white master's slave (New Elite).

"The oppressed always believe the worst about themselves." (Frantz Fanon). Never will they try to break the weak chains bounding around them. They target other people just like them and derive momentary pleasure and stay contented. Ram Persad's attitude towards Balram in the beginning is an example of this. Servants always enjoy being superior among their own circle. Balram remarks that the servants enjoy being remarked 'Sir' by other servants.

Mimicking the already 'Secondary Europeans' is displayed in the characteristics of the middle class. The hazard of remaining as a servant forever is erased off the moment differences arise within the proletariat. It is this conflict within which the masters always work upon in keeping them subservient forever. Such episodes are reflected right from childhood in this class of people- the schoolchildren teasing Balram after he quit school due to financial instability. We need to focus on the aspect that even these young minds could not tolerate unique talent in their own crowd. The School inspector's appreciation for Balram was the main cause of this hatred. When there is already existing difference, then the path in enlarging this gulf by the masters would be still easier.

India has always witnessed social evils like dowry harassment, which continues to exist even today. Majority dowry deaths and harassments are reported in the middle class and lower middle class families alone. People on the same journey of burden fail to empathize the pain of other fellow beings. In this novel too dowry tortures and burdens on bride's family is very much significant in determining the nature of the bourgeois. Families are ruined because of this difference existing amidst them. If people were at least a little bit sensible about their circle, then 'otherness' within them would vanish making the relation strong in order to revolt for their freedom and individual identity.

CONCLUSIONS

"Humanism is the only- I would go so far as saying the final- resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history." (Edward Said)

Nature always bestows people with equal qualities and potential irrespective of their birth and status. It is only after falling prey to sensual pleasures of world that humanity takes an ugly turn. Even after complete liberation from the brutal colonizer, his techniques in keeping people subordinate haven't ceased. *"Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land, but from our minds as well."* (Frantz Fanon). Treating minds of people with humanism are essential now. To this Frantz Fanon once again remarks: *"The basic confrontation which seemed to be colonialism versus anti-colonialism, indeed capitalism versus socialism, is already losing its importance. What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity will have to address this question, no matter how devastating the consequences may be."*

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