

## Postcolonial Socio-Cultural Aspects in Aravind Adiga's Novels

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Even though post-colonialism primarily refers to the period following colonialism, we must take into account the colonial past in order to properly analyse the people and their lives in the post-colonial society; otherwise, our analysis would be distorted and uneven. Stated differently, colonialism affects postcolonial societies on a mental and psychological level in addition to a geographical and political one, leaving an enduring legacy. The colonial powers have been imposing their supposedly civilised norms on the indigenous people for generations. Because of this, colonial artefacts persisted in the world after native cultures attained freedom, leaving their mark on the colonised people's minds and proving that decolonisation is a journey. It is a slow, ongoing process that operates on an intellectual and psychological level and consistently instills in people's minds the idea that former colonial nations are now independent.

**Key words:** - Colonization, Decolonization, Cultural Diversity,

**Introduction:** - Deconstructing outdated, Eurocentric views and attitudes of power, oppression, and racial superiority that were embraced during colonialism is at the heart of this process. The indigenous populations had to claim their identities after achieving independence. For the colonial powers it is not merely transferring power but, to acknowledge equal status of the once colonized people. But in the case of both—the colonizer and the colonized, the independence turned out to be merely a mechanical transfer of power which represented in the words of Robert Young “a relatively minor move from direct to indirect rule, a shift from colonial rule and domination to a position not so much of independence as of being independence” (2006: 3). Madhu Shalini corroborates Young's view by saying, “Colonialism doesn't exist in a formal form any more but it is difficult to efface colonial attitudes which are entrenched deeply in the psyche of the colonized” (198). This is the reason why the post-colonial Indian society has been marked with a strange scenario. The indigenous elites discriminate against the native population in the name of caste, class, gender and religion, and in turn, they are discriminated against by the Europeans. It is interesting to note that, in the West — non-West encounter, the native elite are at the *margin*, suppressed into silence by the *center*, i.e., Europeans. But within the nation-state, the indigenous elite come to the *center* and marginalize the low caste and class people. Thus, the phenomenon of colonization of the weak at the hands of the strong and powerful continues, emphasizing the fact that “...colonization never seems to end with the formal political independence” (Nandy: 03). This is why the anti-colonial resistance continues even in the post-colonial era. This makes the post-colonial encounter between the colonizer and the colonized complex, ambiguous and ambivalent.

This phenomenon necessitates revisiting the concept of colonialism which today does not limit itself to the territorial occupation and rule by the Europeans but encompasses into its ambit the post-colonial conditions in the third world where colonial paradigm still exists in the form of dominant—dominated dichotomy, i.e., unequal relations between different social and cultural communities.

### **Decolonization and Problematics of Cultural Diversity:**

Cultural diversity in India adds to the postcolonial complexity. Postcolonialism implies as Fanon argues the reclamation of the native/indigenous cultural traditions and values (qtd. in Peter Barry: 186). The question then arises as to which culture and values be reclaimed in Indian context. Because the number of different influences have been blended and absorbed into the fabric of Indian society, making it varied, vibrant and colourful. Geeta Mehta and Salman Rushdie point out that, “India exists at different levels of cultural evolution. There is no *one* Indian culture; India comprises of various subcultures which have a distinct position in the Indian social ethos. All these subcultures have a right to exist as Indian” (qtd. in Nazma Malik: 164). While addressing Indian National Congress in 1940, Maulana Azad comments: It was India's ancient destiny for numerous human tribes and cultures to migrate here, settle on her fertile land, and rest here in caravans. India has benefited from the accomplishments of

Islam and Hinduism's eleven hundred years of shared history. Everything that is a result of our collective efforts is reflected in our language, poetry, literature, culture, art, attire, manners and customs, and the countless events that occur in our day-to-day lives. These thousand years of our joint life have moulded us into nationality. (qtd. in Guha: 25)

This makes Palwekar remark, "...India in spirit can claim to be the first and foremost multicultural society on this globe" (79). Colonial powers came to foreign states and disrupted native traditions and cultures. They continuously replaced these traditions with their own ones. It has been frequently asserted that although the European powers may have used their military force to capture the regions, their own cultural output allowed them to hold onto control. When nations gained independence and were abruptly faced with the task of creating a new national identity and self-confidence, this frequently resulted in violence. This problem entails exercising prudence so that the new national identity and the reclamation of the past do not result in homogenisation, which would once more lead to the subjection of minority communities' cultural traditions and beliefs. We should see to it that the poor, the deprived and the down trodden should also get just space, respect, dignity and justice in the postcolonial milieu. Against this background, what India needs is to develop a constitutional culture since the justice, dignity and respect of all the subcultures, minorities and ethnicities are enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Another issue involved in the reclamation of the past indigenous cultural traditions and values is that the pre-colonial past of India was and is full of many repressive and hierarchical social structures like caste system, gender bias and class consciousness. This poses a big challenge to the project of reclaiming the indigenous past and to evolve a national culture free from the colonial structures of oppressor and the oppressed and the *center* and the *margin*. This task becomes crucial particularly in the case of India because "...even prior to the arrival of the British, the ideology of colonialism existed in India in various forms of social oppression and it continues even after the end of British rule in the country" (Abraham: 31). It emphasizes the need to locate the pre-colonial social structures in Indian like caste discrimination, gender bias and class consciousness in the frame of postcolonialism.

The repressive and rigid societal structures like caste discrimination and gender bias still exist in Indian society. The voices of the women and the low caste people are still silenced by the authoritarian centers of upper caste and patriarchy. Society is divided into the hierarchical power structures. There are millions in India who still live below poverty line. They still do not have access to education and health care. There are many who have no identity and self respect. In such a lopsided hierarchical power structure, the section at the bottom develops a sense of being *other* silenced by the authoritarian *self*. The freedom of nation followed by the wave of globalization has not brought much relief to them. Beena Agarwal claims, "The politics of liberalization, the expansion of information Technology and the myth of global community are creating wealth and integrating the cultural diversities but on the other side millions are being deprived of the most basic human needs" (141). Such marginalized people are not measured in an equal scale of humanity. This scenario foregrounds the fact that benefits of globalization are temporary and available only to the privileged section. It offers no solution to the problems of the deprived sections in the society.

The question then arises what "post" in postcolonialism we witness in their status. And the absence of "post" in their status conspicuously makes them "colonial" even in the post-colonial society. We dreamt of an India as a modern nation free from caste and class prejudices and superstitions "moving into freer ethos— politically liberated and culturally receptive to various categories of freedoms— social, political and economic" (Gupta: 2). But the dreams we saw before independence are all shattered. What we see after independence is the utter disillusionment. The power structures which are the result of the lopsided distribution of power still exist in the post-independence India. The *centre* and the *margin* positions are changing according to the politico- economic developments. When the colonial power was at the centre

of authority in the past, the upper caste and class was dominated. On independence, the center of authority was transferred from the colonial rulers to the native masters. Doubly colonized sections of society during the colonial period had the hope that after independence, they would also become a part of mainstream socio-economic and political sphere. However, their dreams to be the stakeholders in all spheres of life were shattered as the distribution of power did not percolate especially to the lowest rung of the society and the marginalized cultural communities. All the three novels under study are the depiction of this disillusionment arisen out of marginalization and oppression which continued even after the independence.

## GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

In the context of global scenario and global life conditions it becomes pertinent to focus on indigenous cultural traditions and values. The question of ethnicity and identity also needs to be freshly addressed in the context of globalization because in this situation the ethnic communities are in a state of margin or periphery where as the Englishness or Americanness is never represented as ethnicity. Globalization in the name of free trade, interconnectedness and demolishing the boundaries pretends to offer free movement into the foreign lands. This has given an impetus to the international transport. As a result, individuals from many nations are observed moving to other countries in order to enhance their socioeconomic opportunities through employment and education. In this regard, the concerns of gender, race, and class are significant. In search of a brighter future for themselves and their families back home, a large number of people from Third World and former colonised nations moved to the West after decolonisation. The need for workers has grown, and immigrants have helped the world's industrialised nations meet this demand. The people of the third world countries are infatuated by the hope of better prospects in the brave new world like America. The project of globalization has been

glorified by using the terms like “multicultural society”, “melting pot” and “American mosaic”. The glamorous dream of American affluence is exported to the third world countries. However, the so called multicultural society of today is marked with prejudice and intolerance, especially in connection with differences in race and ethnicity which has made this world a place “where one side travels to be a servant and the other side travels to be treated like a king” (Inheritance: 269). Their movement to the first world makes them painfully realize that they can neither retain their identity nor improve their socio- economic status. Arundhati Roy underscores the iniquitous nature of globalization. She terms globalization a “corporate globalization” and “imperialism” and further says that, “... they (Americans) have to make sure that its only money, goods, patents and services that are globalized. Not the free movement of people. Not a respect for human rights. No international treaties on racial discrimination or chemical or nuclear weapons or green house gas emissions or climate change, or ...God forbid- justice” (web).

Against this fuss about globalization and so called multiculturalism, Kiran Desai emphatically exposes the discriminatory attitudes of the American society towards the people of the third world. While addressing this issue, Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* “underlines the collapse of the ‘American dream’ of the poor of the third world countries like India” (Mitra: 91). Hence, Arif Dirlik emphasizes that the postcolonial scholars must address the fact that “the colonial past and the postcolonial present have the ‘agency’ of capital in common” (qtd. in Abraham: 124). Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* speaks not only about the alienation and marginalization of the third world immigrants into the first world but she also comments on the ambivalent and complex situation of the natives in the third world countries who tend to become more and more like their former masters in the process of “development” and “modernization”. Thus, globalization not only poses a serious threat to the identity of the third world migrants but also paves a new way of their marginalization. It becomes necessary to think of the way to retain the native cultural practices against the backdrop of the “capital culture” imposed by the global powers. There is an urgent demand to combat capital culture



propagated by the West.

Culture is a constituent factor which is responsible to form the identity of the nation. It is an expression of its value system, traditions and the overall pattern of living. Hence, it is well said that you may conquer a nation by the military prowess but you can maintain the power over that nation by altering the cultural priority of the people living in that nation. Once the people in that country are uprooted from their cultural moorings they are rendered incapable to resist domination. In the post-colonial period, globalization is doing the same thing through encouraging high consumerism and continuous infiltration through the supply of commodities. Therefore, as Frantz Fanon notes, colonial dominance, because it is absolute and tends to oversimplify, very quickly manages to disturb in a spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This is how globalisation leads to cultural imperialism. This cultural obliteration is made feasible by the occupying power's introduction of new legal relations, the denial of national reality, the expropriation, the systematic enslavement of men and women, and colonial society's expulsion of the locals and their customs to outlying territories (1587). This systematic disruption of the native customs and traditions by the colonizers for quite a long period left the colonized native psychologically maimed. Through the strategic attempts and efforts, the colonized was made to accede to the inferiority of his culture which led to, as Fanon says, replacing the dynamism of the natives by a substantification of the attitudes (1587). The years of subjugation and suppression maimed the native psychologically. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the national consciousness began to form and the people started asserting their indigenous culture to combat the colonial domination. But after the political independence, before the native could come out of the colonial hangover, they were confronted with the same imperial forces, this time through globalization. Panda views globalization as "cultural imperialism revisited" and argues, "...globalization and the capital market forces have brought forth a new wave of imperialism with their rising powers in the contemporary world" (105). She also adds that, "Globalization has amply contributed to the reinforcement of cultural and linguistic imperialism in the postcolonial world" (ibid). This is why, Aijaz Ahmad rightly describes globalization as "the latest phase in the history of imperialism" (qtd. in Abraham: 122). The unbridled and subtle expansion of the Western culture via globalization is causing the threat of erasure or homogenization of other cultures in the world leading to the rise of a "monoculture" which is obviously the dominant culture of the West in which anything can be sold and bought. In the name of participation in the so called process of globalization—multiculturalism, modernization and development, the third world population knowingly or unknowingly adopts the culture of their former masters. Again, to put it in the words of Aijaz Ahmad: "...in the present global frame of massive economic restructuring represented through multinationals across the globe, cultures too have been restructured by capitalist economics" (ibid: 123). Thus, what former British colonialism had achieved through English education and the doctrine of racial superiority, the present America led Western imperialism is trying to achieve through the so called globalization and multiculturalism.

Globalization has badly impacted the image of woman in Indian society. The economic and social changes brought about by globalization have posed big challenges to the Indian woman. As the illegal third world immigrants are exploited in the Western countries like America, England, France, Germany etc., the poor and disadvantaged young women are exploited in the free trade zones and in the sweat shops at very low wages by the multinational companies. The multinational companies use the young, educated middle class girls in the call centers. Chetan Bhagat, depicts in his novel *One Night @ the Call Center* how the young force of our country is forced to waste their talent in the call center jobs due to financial constraints and lack of opportunities. He exposes the predicament of the youth in India being reduced to voices and willingly compromising their identities for the lure of a good job. Even the young girls and women are made to work in the night shifts. This phenomenon is the gross violation of the human rights.

**Conclusion:** - However, the Fanonian perspective does not allow us to think of internal colonization in isolation as he thinks of it as an indirect offshoot of colonialism. Fanon argues that colonial domination did not exploit the whole of a country. They mainly focused on exporting the natural resources to enhance the production of the mother country. Hence, they marked out the areas rich with the natural resources and let the people in that area become relatively richer. After national independence, these prosperous regions refuse to accommodate the other nationals. They are reluctant to share this prosperity with the citizens of the other regions. Thus, the regions with abundance and prosperity develop contempt and hatred for the underdeveloped regions within the same nation-state. The rich territories dominate and look down on the poor ones leading them to assume the form tantamount to the internal colonies. Thus, the shadow of colonialism looms large over the process of internal colonialism (Fanon: 1583).

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