

FAST VANISHING BORDERS, PASSPORTS OF HEART AND PROMISES: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SELECT INDIAN NOVELS AND THE GLOBALISED WORLD

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Abstract- Hippolyte Taine famously said literature is a study of “the race, the moment and the milieu” (01). If literature mirrors society, then globalization is very much a theme of many writings for the tremendous change that it has caused over the last two decades. The present paper is an effort to read select novels of Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga who have dealt with the changing times in various of their works. Ghosh in his fictions establishes the fact that globalization is not a present day phenomenon, rather centuries ago the world was closely knit together before the toll of colonization in *The Circle of Reason* and *In an Antique World*. Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* shows how this international entrepreneurial movement brought a new light in the impoverished and marginalized classes but it also proved a dawn of false promises for many. Adiga also takes a lower, labourer class character in *The White Tiger*, who ascends surprising heights propelled by the globalised world but the loopholes are rampant. There is a grand show of money minting but the old values and humane ways of life are trampled over by the means adopted. This overwhelming phenomenon no doubt, improves economy and social structure but the mental and spiritual health of the same flourishing society is scarred and scourged forever. The paper also intends to look at women in perspective of the upcoming situation.

Key words: Globalisation, economic development, new avenues, spiritual lassitude, changes.

I. INTRODUCTION

Our human world is no doubt, a unique one. We live, work, suffer, struggle, enjoy, rest...think and work again. I don't know whether any other planet experiences life in the same way ... some of us with the name of scientists are busy doing their due to find that out. Ours has been an ever moving, ever progressing civilization, marked with change as a constant companion; we have been adopting new ways to improve life; perhaps each moment someone somewhere is bent upon doing that. No wonder, Shakespeare crooned, “what a piece of work man is...” (*Hamlet*, Act II, scene 2, page 1879). Globalisation is an essential link in the chain of changes, gradually covering the earth, getting momentum in the last two decades and making a tremendous effect over all of us in some way. The onset of the new millennium upheld this eventual phenomenon to be suffused with novel energy and life changing promises. A poem composed by Carl Sandburg (*Prairie*, 1918) in another context may fit here for the purpose of defining Globalisation-
I speak of new cities and new people.
I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.

I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down, a sun dropped in the west.

I tell you there is nothing in the world only an ocean of to-morrows, a sky of to-morrows.

High promises always sound that big, that glorious, don't they? But to some, they also sound hollow- an undeniable fact. Thus, we ushered into an age embracing globalization in an extravagant way, we took it as the panacea, some accepted it with suspicions, some grudgingly, some resisted it and are still resisting- for nothing can fit one and all with the same ease. That's again, human civilization!

My paper entitled “fast vanishing borders, the passports of heart and promises: analysis of select literature and the globalised world” is an effort to show these varying reactions to this inevitably powerful phenomenon called Globalisation, and **power**, *my friends*, is a complex, perilously hazardous thing in itself!

II. DISCUSSION

Amitav Ghosh in his fictions establishes the fact that globalization is not a present day phenomenon, rather centuries ago the world was closely knit together before the toll of colonization in *The Circle of Reason* and *In an Antique World*. In his very first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, 1988, he gives the readers a beautifully written journey of ‘cloth’, its history through the silk route running across China, Central Asia, souks of Persia to Mediterranean ports, to markets of Africa and Europe; how unnamed, unsung weavers and travellers made new routes on water and land to exchange clothes, fabrics and embroidery. He believes that ‘cloth tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time’ (55). No doubt, “Indian cloth was found in the graves of the Pharaohs, Indian soil is strewn with cloth from China... (56). But loom was man's ‘curse as well as salvation’, how ‘cotton wars’ have not been paid attention, how Lancashire poured out its waterfalls of cloth, ensured every continent buy it with force and ‘strangled the very weavers and techniques they had crossed oceans to discover’ (57). He mourns how millions of Africans and half of America were enslaved by cotton, not to mention the *girmitya* labourers of India thrown around the world for the same reason. First the loom, then machine, now technology have been spanning across continents and centuries to decide the fate of

mechanical man. Cotton like opium, indigo, sugarcane, tea and silk has caused a 'gory history' in itself. It makes me suspicious that as "every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past" (58), every form of G is also fraught with greed and destruction. Today we are basking in its glory but innumerable people are also paying the price of this progress as other novels exhibit.

In *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh again gives the trajectory of pre-colonial harmony of the world in the sphere of trade, which was more of inter-dependence than the disturbed equilibrium of power and powerlessness. By studying archives in libraries and museums across Egypt, France, Mangalore, Philadelphia, Cairo to Alexandria..., Ghosh gets details of trade and exchange between Ben Yiju the Egyptian fellah living in Tulunad of India, with his family and how he trusted his Indian trade helper Bomma with the responsibility of not only delivering a quantity of merchandise, but also for bringing back a large shipment of goods for his household like 4 hasiras/ mats from Berbera/ Somaliland, a leather table cloth, an iron frying pan, a sieve, a large quantity of soap, two Egyptian gowns, and presents like raisin sugar, a quire of white paper and coral for his new born boy (267). Whereas Ben Yiju is recorded to have sent Gujrat carpets, Dibiqi shawls with embroidered borders, palm sugar, and mounds of Malabar spices and coffee. Talhi paper was the most sought after gift besides noughat, raisins and dates from Nile-nourished lands (269). The history books reveal to his surprise that slavery had a much different meaning in those days cleansed of the darkness, the violence and mortifying humiliation it connotes to us. Rather, "slavery was the principal means of recruitment into some of the most privileged sectors of army and bureaucracy in Middle East and India", it was often a kind of "career opening" to ascend higher posts with a voluntary "surrender of a part of their freedom" (260) to their Ustaaz, guru or guardians. The legend of Mehmood and Ayaaz (262), the 'Sufi' culture (261) prevalent then and even Shakespearean sonnets later reveal this aspect as acceptable. The 11th century poetry celebrated bondage as a central metaphor of religious life; slavery was the paradoxical embodiment of perfect freedom (261)! But where's G? Why do we eulogize this queer part of past? I narrate these brief snapshots because I believe as Ghosh believes that those days also showcase a globalised life. The waterways were choked with ships of all sizes going to and fro throughout the world. As W. H. Auden put it, "far off like floating seeds the ships/ diverge on urgent errands..." (Palgrave:510). He finds details about numerous people whose fortunes were founded on the trade between India and the Middle East as brokers, financiers and merchants, travelling extensively, making "Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta seem unremarkable in comparison" (157). Vasco da Gama landed on his first voyage to India in 1498- some 350 yrs after BenYiju and his ilk left Hind. No place had a pure virgin existence, but they were free of the snaring tricks and smashing attacks of Colonial instincts which they tasted bitterly with the arrival of Portuguese, Dutch, French, Europeans and finally British one after another.

Ghosh beautifully eulogises how 'the territorial and dynastic ambitions were never allowed to spill over into the sea' (286), how the peaceful tradition of the oceanic trade was a product of a rare cultural choice, built upon beliefs of pacifism, bargaining and compromise. The East faced a new situation where 'between resistance and submission; co-operation was not offered' (288), as they tried to quench these alien ambitious warrior like merchants' demonic thirst raging ever since, for almost 500 yrs (288) over the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Ignoring history has always caused peril for us. So, if an unnamed globalisation could pave the way for an unforgettable colonisation, the way ahead is no less precarious- the same globalisation may have the seeds of neo-colonialism too...or it has already sprouted in the forms of source draining, oil-wars, food crisis, deforestation, environmental commotion, villages- land and water resources encroached upon, machinery, pests and diseases shrouding us from all sides...Today we have much more than we want, but we also want more than we need, many more do not have even that which they essentially need to live and survive...this is also G. Arundhati Roy cogently presses this idea by saying that in "the era of corporate G, poverty is a crime and protesting against further impoverishment is terrorism" (102). In fact, G is just a new avatar of the continuing imperialism, if we read between the lines. The faces change.

In all his novels, Amitav Ghosh talks about diaspora as well though it may not be a deliberate choice. For diaspora has become part of the norm after the stirring experience of colonialism in so many ways. When Partition of India and the subsequent partition of Pakistan made people get thrown across borders, they were either migrants or Muhajirs. They lived on new lands with newly etched borders and names, but breathed in the lost homes of memories, leading a double life as if in stories as does Thamma, Tridib, Ila, May and Jothumoshai in *The Shadow Lines*; Zindi, Alu, Kulfi and Karthamma have a life better in Al Ghazira than the one they bore in back breaking impoverishment in Indian villages of remote and negligence. But, their movement does not stop, they keep straddling borders and fences as illegal immigrants chased by the spectre of police of all the nations they touch...in *The COR*. But most of them end up getting enmeshed in legal broils, fleeing from one place to another, some getting killed, jailed or even committing suicide. They are not only away from home, but remain homeless from the beginning to the end. They live a borrowed life shrouded in fear and suspicion. Ghosh shows how the dream to become rich and respectable remains a 'false Utopia' for them.

The Hungry Tide is another tragic tale of human bravery and fatalism in the hands of British, the independent Indian govt and the jungle monsters when they chose to live free of any the new nations and settle down in Sunderban. First the man-eaters prowl and devour them, then the Globally sympathetic Save Tiger Campaign leaves them with no choice but to get drowned, become morsel of crocodiles or get caught in concentration camps. The world campaign voted for protection of Bengal tigers at the cost of human life. So, who is to live and who is not to live, who are qualified to be called

human, who are not... **Gloalisation is dictating that, my dear audience!**

According to Roland Robertson, “Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.” So the world is a smaller place now, with lot of travels and migrations- humanity is experiencing a novel life at an unprecedented level. Every body can be free of the “tyranny of the place”, paying no penalty for being born in a remote, out of the way place. The cook’s son, Biju enjoys the same pleasures of global America in the novel *Inheritance of Loss* by the Man Booker Prize winner Kiran Desai. Biju becomes a beacon of light for numerous local, downtrodden, toiling fathers of young sons, turning Jemubhai Patel, the judge to a long forgotten myth. It is another extension of globalization that this diasporic character returns back India as a pauper, poorer than he ever had been in his life. Desai sheds light upon this “freeing” phenomenon from a different angle, exhibiting how it commodifies cultures, opens paths ahead as well as the insurgents eyes at the same time. It causes a havoc and chaos in the normal life of common people in Kalimpong.

Thus, the free markets have opened doors for such ignorant and uneducated womenfolk too, though surviving the battle and then only ‘getting the butter’ applies here also, as comments Kiran Desai (IOL, 134). This points towards the brutal Darwinian logic and increasing inequality but global advocates like Woolridge and Micklethwait are prompt with ready responses to that doubt in spite of all. They believe it to create not a “winner takes all society, and the winners hugely outnumber the losers”(11). Globalization thus, for such observers represents spread of common values for the benefit of humanity. It proclaimed the sacred word of promoting the well-being of billions of people like a godly panacea through consciousness for individual rights, spread of democratic politics and market oriented policies. But these very factors turn against the common people in an amazing array of contexts and situations- as represented by Desai. She shows globalization as a “False Dawn”.

The first catch of globalization is how a hundred million peasants became migrant labourers in various places, new laws either strangled them, excluded them from proper work and participation in society, or mostly bore with inhuman conditions. Desai’s *Inheritance Of Loss* shows Biju living down below the Gandhi Café kitchen, lured by the ‘free housing’ (146) scheme like all other low waged workers- Jeev, Rishi, Lalkala and Saeed Saeed, pretending it to be a “happy family”(IOL, 123). They had no choice but to accept these pathetic living conditions toiling for 16-17 hours a day to send home some extra bucks driven by lusty slogans like - “another day, another dollar!”(147).

Every metropolitan now swarms of people from different places and cultures – as a natural result of globalization, commercialization of living and in the words of Aravind Adiga – technologisation of the present times (*White Tiger*, 12). Kiran Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri pursue the tales abounding the American Dream which emerged as a universal cure for numerous nationals across the world, in 1960s, 70s and somehow it still continues even today – spiralling newer

ideas, alluring enough even for the most stringent of Sikhs, Brahmins and Saiyyads. It saw hoards stomping towards USA as if all native places were sinking boats and only one door was open to welcome, accommodate them altogether! Kiran Desai in *Inheritance of Loss* puts this phenomenon as the ‘suited & booted success’ (2006:80). For it opened ‘doors’ not only in favour of affluent class, educated class, skilled class but also for those ‘born and raised in Darkness’ (Adiga, 14). Thus, the world witnessed a new dawn, dividing it in places of light and darkness as Balram Halwai reports. USA became everybody’s secret plan, an open shut secret plan!

Lahiri, a winner of Pulitzer Prize winner and nominee for Booker – has touched the throbbing vein of a Diaspora in USA in a way that sounds so close, so irresistibly one’s own. She presents the primrose path which so many desired to tread, the blossoming of life aboard, the much desired & dreamt life coming as a gift of the meritocracy & opportune times. But she also looks at the other side of the picture with the inner eye of experience and perception, measuring the tuggings of the heart and the ‘mind of the winter’ (Said: 439) especially among the first generation migrants. She focuses on the tussle of worldly achievements and personal failures, specially the women characters. She depicts how even sensibly intelligent and happy people like Ashima and Mrs. Sen live a life filled with the sense of incompleteness, when deprived of the ‘nourishment of one’s own tradition of family’ (Said: 440) by change of geography. As if their very accomplishments become a cause of deportation and exile with unconscious ‘mutilations’ on the psyche. She shows how everyday life becomes a merely bearable residuum of what they lived months ago as a complete person at another place. The alienation of the foreign land makes them all go through an orphanizing experience much before they actually attain that unfortunate status.

The second merit of her fictions is the creatively exact descriptions of the second generation Diaspora, their incomprehension towards an imposed motherland, a language and culture of their parents, making them stand out, the stigma of colour and colonialism which do not go in spite of all multicultural refrains. She looks at their pain of not fitting in the homogeneity expected of them every now and then. How being ‘natural’, Black, Brown or having different food habits, is either a rebellion or a wrenching away for them and they keep struggling to ride the two boats in equal pace, while the first generation longs for continuation of an affiliation of the home culture, hesitantly letting go some of the old habits, old notions.

“For being’ a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, continuous feeling out of sorts” (2012: 49). She hated the feelings of pity & respect (50) shown to her as the forlorn Biblical Ruth in foreign lands. The lonely life makes her feel insulted, she is torn by the fact the there’s ‘no grand parent or uncle or aunt at her side at the baby’s birth’ (24). Ashima finds it unnatural and hideously pitiful that her baby had entered the world ‘so alone, so deprived,’ like a haphazard, half true American thing (25). The baby ritual performed amidst ‘substitute acquaintances’ (40) batter her heart for days.

For Mrs. Sen, in the short story by the same name in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), her home in Bengal is a metaphoric allusion to a pattern of sensibility, a pattern of life which is amiss in her new American apartment decorated with elephant prints of Indian fabrics. Being with parents, people speaking her language, eating rice & fish made a nodal point in her life; as an area of vision encompassing sets of all meanings, straight or conflicting. In the beginning, a girl married aboard was a glamorous, dazzling thing. Parents boasted about it with happiness and satisfaction. But for none of the Indian women shown in Lahiri's works, it is the same. It is a matter of pride for the family but for the women/wives, "it is usually an act of despair or confusion," V.S. Naipaul opines (*India: A wounded civilization*, 43). He further notes, "It leads to ceaselessness,..., the loss of a place in the world; and few Indians are equipped to cope with that" (*India*). Perhaps she was also one of them. She lived in a void, she needed India and all its reassurance to have her being. It is very much like what Susan Sontag said, "Most of the time, the 'reminiscences of self' are reminiscences of place" (1979 : 19) and it seems the place made by her people navigated her happiness and pleasures which she finds so scarce in her new life. Hers is a fretting time that she passes each day as if waiting for going back to her parents where she might have left the box containing all her laughs, smiles, secret pleasures and open exuberance by forgetfulness and instead picked up one containing all her sorrows, frowns, sulks – all conjured up in that one red, straight line of vermilion on her scalp – confused as oozing "blood" (1999: 133) by young Eliot and older policemen of the town. If people are constituted of sensibility lent by places, then the USA of so many luxuries and education do not appeal to her. Her experience as a wife and person can be interpreted in relation to place and familiarity again. There's a complex relationship between space and identity; space both produces and expresses one's identity. The words 'where from?' make more than a residual descriptive container – they constitute the socio-spatial and emotional-intellectual identity too.

Aravind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008) created great uproar not only by bagging the coveted Man Booker Prize 2008 but also by its realistic and graphic portrayal of India. The book brings before us an authentic portrayal of India - poverty and corruption overlying a supposedly teeming economy and the radically changing social fabric of a rising superpower. Moreover, the mock in the tone of the narrator makes it almost unforgivable; the sneer is seething and the taunt is disappointedly new for the frame of a fiction amidst all assembled euphoric representations of India for the last half century. We knew her through Rushdie, Ghosh, Desais, Tharoor and Roy in a much 'like' way in terms of the Face Book era; and here's this guy- a reborn 'Coolie'-chanting one, breaching the veils, rather ripping them apart ruthlessly to show a face- pock marked but brilliant with a borrowed shine. Did you say 'moon'? Oh yes, he conjures up the daytime faceless moon to counter the dazzling, romantic full moon Indian view. And it goes a long way...

Adiga, no doubt, is the post-modern cyber world Charles Dickens of India. What Charles Dickens did centuries ago,

Adiga is doing anew in a much changed scenario – puncturing the aureole of glory – subverting the tales of English wealth accumulated across colonies but starving her angelic orphans of *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*, or at the worst compelling them to come out as Balram Halwai like comen. This new India also boasts of gold spitting boats, swanky cities of Bangalore and Poona, bright with the power of moolah but surrounded by serpentine labyrinth of paupers and destitute of every caste and class. The villages in North India along the holy river of Ganges are the microcosm of the synchronised presence of new and old Indias – new India of Ashok Sharma and Pinky Madam for whom money does not buy beauty of life.

Old India of villages are rotting and drying up with little work and even lesser wages and money. It is the India where irrigation schemes go awry for the money does not reach the peasants, rather it reaches the landlords and middlemen's accounts. Their *paan*-stuffed mouths, high rising paunches, higher walled bungalows and retinue of undyingly faithful servants create that barrier of classes, living together. Thus, Adiga depicts how pockets of light are marked by open seams of poverty and darkness. One person acquires wealth by impoverishing a whole village. And this is democracy – the holiest of all kinds of governance! Corporate globalisation project is no doubt ripping through people's lives with monstrous dispossessions, but protecting the Western markets quite brazenly. Chomsky diagnosed it accurately by calling the free market policy to be running on a business of managing public opinion and manufacturing of consent (306). Balram described his previous life of poverty and helplessness with the metaphor of a chicken coop in which chicks are stuffed to such an extent that they can't move or come out, fed a staple diet to be sacrificed finally. Globalisation is also running on the basis of guarding the common man from reality, as Arundhati Roy puts it, "ordinary people are reared in a controlled climate, in an altered reality like broiler chicken or pigs in pen" (2006: 50).

Halwai is just a guide to modern-day India, and his comments cover everything and anything: family, marriage, sanitation, politics, police, booze, religion, shopping malls, water buffalo, traffic, fashion, schools. The Chinese premier is treated to accounts of the deaths of Halwai's parents, his all-too-brief school days, and his escape from the machinations of his surviving relatives, his contrivances in securing a job as a driver to a wealthy and corrupt family, and his increasing independence of mind after he moves to the big city. In the region of Light, Bangalore is the epitome of technological development in India where modern generation aspires to achieve the heights in their lives. Balram's entry is also inspired by one such hope and aspiration.

Thus, Balram is a new, modern alchemist who turns an opportunity out of treason. The murder was flawless, effortless as if it was inevitable, a providential thing, meant to be accomplished by the driver. He had realized well beforehand that he "was destined not to stay a slave" (41) for long. As Raju the guide could not help but become the fasting Sadhu, urged by the love and reverence of the villages in the immortal tale by R K Naraynan, Balram too had to exert his power of

powerlessness to rise up as the reincarnation of the business magnet. Ashok had fallen in his hands deliberately in a suicidal manner to help him come out of the draining quagmire without rewards. As if everything was 'arranged just for you' (282) and he was destined to do it and prosper. Ashok's disillusionment with Indian *politics*, its deep alleys in the business, his disenchantment with American Indian Pinky as wife and renewed attachment to the unknown North eastern woman – all make him incongruous for the profession he was pushed to. He neither possesses his father nicknamed the Stork's shrewdness and cruel nature, nor does he have Balram's single-minded fidelity and treasonous nature. He could desert his all loving family, failing helplessly for his favour, it was but natural that Balram should wrench away the mask of fidelity and honesty as well. This is thus, a fresh aspect of G where a native finds it unnecessary to oblige to his or her nation. They carve out a new set of moral values. He did not wait like others for 'the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else ... every man must make his own Benaras' (304). The narrator is pointing to many implicit fears of the nation, people indulging in various movements like Naxalism, Bodoland demand or even trespassing as traitors to come out of subjugation. But he declares all as futile. Nobody looks at the 'Benaras' inside, the solution already lying within and close at hand. Yet Balram finds himself serving the nation in his own ubiquitous way. He is prosperous, happy, but to readers like us, it's a hippie paradise. He lives for the present only. The unsmelt rancour in his heart which even he himself had not known – finds an allegory in the Ganges, the holy river choking with all filth any person could sense but the film of exoticism keeps her revered by all sorts of people even Americans.

III. CONCLUSION

The White Tiger was a jolt for many of us, which seemed to alter the vision of India presented in so many literary incarnations previously, eclipsing all with its spectacular

resurgence. But the readers should mind it that Balram is not an oracle, nobody can be one. For truth is not one. It is many at one time, with different perspectives and dimensions; no story can claim to be the final. Balram is one shade, one nuance only. We shall have to wait, not for Godot, but for another narration to subsume it and surpass it.

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