

# Re-Orientalism

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Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' refers to 'construction of the East as primitive, pagan, savage, undeveloped, criminal and needing reform. Europe and Orient were discursively represented as binary oppositions. The Orient, Europe's 'other' was integral to the very formation of European Identity. Said argued that the native subject is 'interpellated' into colonial structures and roles through ideology. Said endowed 'contrapuntal reading' of a text against its grain, in order to detect the radicalized imperialist discourse within it.

Prior to the 1980's, the world's knowledge of India was limited to the description of English authors like E.M. Foster's 'A Passage to India', John Master's 'Bhovani Junction' etc. These are the kind of texts which Edward Said is talking about in his essay 'Orientalism'.

In the 1930's, the writers like Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan became popular as Indian writers in English. But primarily the writers who broke through the English language market were the writers of Indian diaspora like Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Arvind Adiga etc.

This trend of popularity raises many questions like what are the features of this latest Anglo-Indian literature that amount to its popularity and fashionable status? Is this popularity associated with their catering to the Western sensibility? Is the view projected by them any different from the portrayal of India by Foster and Master? Do the Indo-Anglican writers still function under the hegemony of the West and aim towards 'impressing the whites'? Are all the contemporary Indian authors mentally hegemonized or there are some exceptions that do not cater to a specific audience and do not want the approval of Western readers and critics?

The research paper would be focusing on the mental colonization of the Indian authors especially the authors of Indian Diaspora or the ones who have spent considerable time living in the West. Thereby the paper intends to compare these authors with the ones who do not write to please the western publishers and readers. There will be a comparative study of the writing styles of the works by Arvind Adiga, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh and Khushwant Singh.

Frantz Fanon developed a psychoanalytic theory of postcolonialism where he suggests that European 'Self' levels in its relation and encounter with the 'Other'. In an attempt to deal with the psychological inadequacy the native tries to be as white as possible by adopting the Western values, religion, language and practices of the White, and by rejecting his own culture. Final call is this phenomenon donning white masks over black skin is resulting in a duality and experiencing a schizophrenic atmosphere.

A similar schizophrenic state can be associated with the diasporic writers. Diaspora refers to people who have been displaced or dispersed from their homelands, and who possess and share a collective memory, myth and nostalgic reminiscence of 'home'. The central theme in postcolonial diasporic literature is the negotiation of two identities, the split consciousness of being both, yet neither completely.

Arvind Adiga is an Indian-Australian writer whose family migrated to Sydney after his high school. His Booker prize winning novel, 'The White Tiger' has often been criticized for being a superficial account of India. Salman Rushdie is a British Indian writer who moved to Britain at a very young age. He has often been criticized for marketing the exotic. Rohinton Mistry, is a Canadian Indian and in terms of subject, style, and audience his fiction is also set in India but aimed towards explaining the West about the ways of the Orient. Amitav Ghosh and Khushwant Singh have had contact with the West at various points in their lives but their writings do not give the impression of being written by an outsider who is trying to gain the attention of the West by portraying a semi-authentic version of India.

Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum is a virtual or fake reality simulated or induced by the media or other ideological apparatuses. The Western media wants to project a certain image of India to its readers. This is an ideological apparatus to

continue to maintain the Western cultural hegemony by projecting India as a land of chaos, violence, unsophistication etc., everything that West doesn't want itself to be tagged as. The diasporic writers left India a certain time ago. The progress made by India meanwhile may not be given justice in the works by these authors.

Western media takes for granted that all writers are authentic literary voice of the country India. In order to be recognized and praised by the Western audience, some authors are selling the West what it wants to see. Foucault's power structure or Gramsci's 'hegemony' can be seen to be at work in this scenario. Western media has normalized a version of India in front of the world.

Many of the India writers are consenting to adapt their works to that image in order to win appraisal from the Western readers.

Let us take the example of Aravind Adiga's novel, 'The White Tiger'. In the recent years Orientalism has developed a new branch called "re-orientalism", a term given by Lau. This has been brought to the fore by Aravind Adiga's representation of 'dark India' in his novel.

The name of the novel itself suggests that the reader is going to see something exotic and rare. His various references of the poorer India as "darkness" can be interpreted as a diasporic writer's view of the home country as a place of injustice and unsavoury corruption. Adiga primarily plays to the Western gallery. In order to please the West, he portrays the chaotic image of India that the West wants to see. In doing so, he doesn't provide any different opinion of India than the one projected by Foster and Durell.

Critic Ativama Kumar writes "for a novel that is supposed to be a portrait of the 'real' India, The White Tiger comes across as curiously inauthentic. Is it a novel from one more outsider, presenting cynical anthropologies to an audience that is not Indian".

Adiga represents the poverty in India to be exotic and exotically different. For instance when Balam returns to his village in Bihar, no sentiments are associated with it. He does not recognize any person or landmark. This makes his perspective of a downtrodden Indian sound inauthentic.

"I guess, Your Excellency, that I too should start off by kissing some god's arse. Which god's arse, though? There are so many choices. See, the Muslims have one god. The Christians have three gods. And we Hindus have 36,000,000 gods. Making a grand total of 36,000,0004 divine arsens for me to choose from."

Adiga presents the same down trodden view of India as a superstitious country with so many gods. He has conveniently packaged the oriental gods with the IT culture emerging. The exoticism and the newly emerging IT sector-both being part of all that the West is interested to read about India.

Salman Rushdie laid to rest the debate about whether English can be used as a language to portray Indian discourse. A writer does not have to belong to England in order to express in English. Similarly a male can be a feminist writer; a white person can write about the issues of the blacks very authentically, one does not have to be a dalit to write good dalit literature. A diasporic Indian writer does not live in India anymore and hence is not expected to write about the ground everyday realities of the Indian scenario. But at the same time he should not claim to write the "truth" about the country. "If anyone knows the truth about Bangalore, it's me." (The White Tiger).

The whole discourse of re-orientalism became a bone of contention through Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight Children'. Rushdie also packages the orient for the consumption of the West. Unlike other diasporic writers, he does not deny his involvement in the inescapable commodification of his cultural production. His novels being a consumer item and their financial prosperity relies on their mainstream success. He is self-consciously involved in the marketing of the exotic.

Categorizations such as deterritorialization (Rushdie as cosmopolitan diasporic writer) and reterritorialization (Rushdie as an Indian writer) aid in the better management and production of cultural products. Though the protagonist 'Saleem Sinai' in 'Midnight's Children', engages with the Orientalist essentializations in a self-ironical manner and thus he exposes the metropolitan reader's desire for exoticism.

Salman Rushdie on being criticized for inauthentic representation of India, brings out his diasporic card and insists that it is not his purpose to create 'authentic' Indian literature but stresses on his postcolonial diasporic identity of a writer who draws his experiences from two countries.



Amitav Ghosh in his work 'The Shadow Lines' and Rushdie in 'Midnight's Children', use fantasy and fiction for their representation of the history of partition in India. Yet, both the writers handled the narration and the techniques in very different manners. Rushdie has kept in mind his 'cosmopolitan' readership while Ghosh's work does not seem to have a particular audience in mind.

The depth of Ghosh's research in his work 'Sea of Poppies' is exceptional. He strives for authenticity not just in representation but also in language. If a word in Bhojpuri, Bengali, or hinglish exists for a kind of ship or an article of clothing, he uses it. This makes the appended glossary handy and worth the trouble. His art is a creative endeavour of portraying the Sikh consciousness authentically.

Similar is the case with Khushwant Singh. The wide variety of his works contains windows to innumerable depictions of the urban India. Yet none of these portrayals seem to be written for a Western market. The question of readership or audience does not come to mind while reading his works. Instead they come forth as anthropological studies of the characters in a larger Indian context. The portrayal of the lives of these protagonists gives the reader the impression of authenticity. Reading through the simple vocabulary of Khushwant Singh, the audience can make out that the purpose of the works was not to "impress the whites"

In my personal opinion there seems to be a difference of authenticity in the representation of India by authors like Adiga, Rushdie, Mistry, Arundhati Roy on one hand and authors like Amitav Ghosh and Khushwant Singh on the other. The difference seems to be based on the lines of the kind of audience the writer has in mind while writing a piece of fiction. Ideally the question of audience should not arise because writing is a creative process and having a particular audience in mind will make it a consumer product.

Thus, this is a classic case of the concept of "culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno). According to it, a culture is a product of social and economic conditions and art therefore is not a pure 'aesthetic' realm but one which is produced and sold like other consumer goods. Thus the act of writing fiction by keeping Western readers, critics and publishers in mind, consciously or not, the authors of Indian diaspora are subjecting their texts to re-orientalism.

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