National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai
National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai

By Sonali Das
National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai

By Sonali Das

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Sonali Das

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Dedicated to my Parents
for their immense love & support
The loss of national identity is the greatest defeat a nation can know, and it is inevitable under the contemporary form of colonization.

—Slobodan Milosevic
CONTENTS

Preface ........................................................................................................ ix

Acknowledgements .................................................................................... xi

Chapter I ...................................................................................................... 1
Narrating a Nation and Defining National Identity

Chapter II ................................................................................................... 19
Reconfiguring Cultural Studies and Postcolonialism

Chapter III ................................................................................................. 39
National Identity and Cultural Representation in *The God of Small Things*

Chapter IV ................................................................................................. 59
National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Kiran Desai

Chapter V ................................................................................................ 101
Conclusion

Appendix A ............................................................................................. 115
Booker Laureates and their Works

Appendix B .............................................................................................. 119
List of my Publications related to the Theme of the Book

Bibliography ............................................................................................ 121
The Indian English novel came into existence in the 1930s with the pioneering efforts of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. At that time Gandhian thought and idealism permeated the whole country. It influenced the works of the novelists too. Hence we find Gandhi as a character or theme in many of the novels in the 1930s. For e.g., the character of Moorthy in Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) is modelled on Gandhi. Political history of India has been well delineated by Indian English novelists. Some such fiction include Manohar Malgonkar’s *The Princes* (1963), Mulk Raj Anand’s *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953, 1970), Kamala Markandaya’s *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), etc. Khushwant Singh’s *A Train to Pakistan* (1956), Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) deal with Partition and its gory aftermath.

Globalization led to increased incidents of migration across continents. This gave rise to the concepts of immigrants, emigrants and diasporas, among others. Hence, the second part of the twentieth century saw a growth of novels dealing with identity of an individual and his position in a cosmopolitan world. Thus novels witnessed fiction-history interface. This new way of looking at reality is termed ‘New History’ which differs from older historians’ concern only with politics, nation and governance. New History brings into its purview diverse and neglected groups of people. We realise that the hitherto marginalized section of the society like slaves, peasants, workers, women, children, etc came to occupy a substantial place in human consciousness through new history. They became the subject and agents of their own history and not the objects of some dominant group.

Indian English fiction expanded its territory to include the previously forgotten sections of society. Post 1980s Indian English fiction is preoccupied with the social-political-cultural history. History, “wrong footed” and “caught off guard”, is “Sloughed off like an old snake-skin”, says Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*. Roy thinks of history as a burden; it is unalterable and cannot be challenged and has its own cruel ways of dealing with those who refuse to fit into its pattern. A host of
novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mukul Kesavan, Kiran Desai and others have pursued this postcolonial postmodern narrative. Indian traditions, culture, myths and socio-political history have been revisited by these novelists. As Hasan Suroor says the new novelists are engaged in ‘reworking old myths’, ‘portraying private griefs and dilemmas’.

This book seeks to analyse the position of the small and the neglected sections of the society vis-à-vis the social, cultural and political conditions of their nations, as portrayed in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai’s novels – *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. Apart from the acts of transgression depicted differently in the novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, this book also deals with several contemporary issues like the identity of an individual in a multicultural world where cultures and natures converge into a melting pot. Both the Man Booker Prize winning authors – Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai – are cosmopolitan authors. They travel extensively all over the globe and portray their characters based on their personal experiences. Being writers of the Third World, they carry the burden of presenting the true picture of the Oriental world to the Occidental world. This book is divided into five chapters which basically deal with the above mentioned issues.

The concepts of ‘national’ and ‘cultural’ identity are the buzzwords in the present century due to the impact of globalization. Despite the enormous march of society due to globalization, the age old inequities still linger. Whereas the subalterns in *The Inheritance of Loss* are disempowered by the brunt of globalisation (mixed with the forces of neo-colonialism), the subalterns in *The God of Small Things* face the ire of the deep-seated divisions based on caste and gender bias in a postcolonial society. The character of Sampath Chawla, protagonist of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, shows the credulous nature of modern people and how unguarded they become before a foreseer. The “shadow class” (*The Inheritance of Loss*), the “Monkey Baba” (*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*) and the “small things” (*The God of Small Things*) are symbols of the hypocrisies that a postcolonial society in a neo-colonial set up hide in its heart. This book contests these contemporary social issues as presented in the novels by the two Indian English women novelists, Roy and Desai, which transcend the limitation of time and space.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this book has been one of the most significant challenges in my academic life. It fulfils my childhood desire of becoming a writer. I wish to record my grateful thanks to all those well-wishers who inspired and helped me to complete it.

At the outset, I express my sincerest gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Professor Suman Mahapatra, former Director, Higher Education, Odisha who has supported me throughout my doctoral work with his patience and knowledge while allowing me the room to work in my own way.

Nearly 15 years of seminar participation experiences at the National and International level conferences and seminars organised by The Researchers’ Association, Odisha; Dhvanyaloka, Mysore; Ravenshaw University, Cuttack; Osmania University Centre for International Programmes, Hyderabad; Association for English Studies of India, Visakhapatnam; NIT, Durgapur, where I got an opportunity to interact with eminent Professors, scholars and researchers of English Literature, helped me immensely in compiling this book. The keynote addresses by Professors of eminence at the seminars organised by The Researchers’ Association, Odisha like Prof. Shiv K Kumar (who left for his holy abode on 28th February, 2017 – a personal loss), Prof. Rupin W Desai, Prof. C R Visweswara Rao, Prof. Rajnath, Prof. Prabhat K Singh, Prof. C.N. Srinath, Prof. B. Parvathi, Prof. K. Nirupa Rani, Prof. Avadesh Kumar Singh and Prof. Haldhar Panda among others, were rich sources of information and knowledge that guided me in writing this book.

I would like to thank eminent editors of reputed and peer reviewed journals like Prof. Bijay Kumar Das (The Critical Endeavour), Prof. C.N. Srinath and Prof. Ragini Ramachandra (The Literary Criterion), Prof. G.S. Balarama Gupta (The Indian Journal of English Studies), Prof. B. Sudipta (Indian Scholar), Prof. K.K. Sharma (Points of View), Shri G R K Murty (The Icfai Journal of English Studies) etc. for selecting my research papers and articles for publication in their esteemed journals.

I am thankful to the librarians of the following libraries: Kanika Library of Ravenshaw University; Central Library of University of Burdwan; Library
Acknowledgements

of IUP, Hyderabad; Library of Bhadrak Autonomous College, Bhadrak; and Central Library of Synergy Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar for their timely help.

I express my gratitude to all my teachers since my school days who have contributed to my education, especially Late Sri Kanhu Charan Mohanty (my geography tutor and a man who taught me the value of labour and self-reliance). I would remain ever grateful to my teacher, Prof. Ashok Kumar Mohanty who taught me at the PG level, for being a sincere teacher and a genuine human being. Words cannot express my gratitude to the two teachers (my father’s teachers) – Prof. M. Q. Khan and Prof. D. K. Ray – for being our support system since ages. My sincerest thanks to Dr Anupama Chowdhury for inspiring me with her works.

I would remain immensely grateful to Prof. Pradipta Kumar Swain, the Former Principal of Bhadrak Autonomous College, Bhadrak (where I work as an Assistant Professor of English) for being a great source of support and help.

It’s impossible to churn out a book without the warmth, love and encouragement of your family. My father always says that parents need not be thanked, but I believe in the art of being grateful. So, I would like to begin with my homage to my Late Grandfathers – Shri Bairagi Charan Das and Shri Narendra Kumar Khillar, who would have been delighted to see this book; and my respect to my beloved Grandmothers – Ms Sudhali Das and Ms Kanakalata Khillar, for their love and affection.

I express my soulful indebtedness to my father, Professor Bijay Kumar Das. I owe him unpayable debt for my education, achievements and my existence. I thank my mother, Ms Kalpana Das for supporting me throughout and prioritizing my studies before everything else; my brother, Soumen Das for keeping me updated about arrival of new literary books in the market and even gifting me some of those and the Kindle paperwhite; my sweet, lovable sister-in-law, Partha Pinaki, for always been there for me; and last but certainly not the least, a big thank you to my entire family, to my affectionate Parveen Didi, to my dear friends from my childhood days till date for enriching my life with their presence, and to the entire editorial team of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their support and timely assistance.

As is customary, we place every novel venture at the feet of the Almighty. Hence, I lay this maiden venture of mine and my life at the lotus feet of God. Let His Will Prevail!
CHAPTER ABSTRACTS

Chapter I

Narrating a Nation and Defining National Identity

Borrowing the idea from Seton-Watson, Benedict Anderson states that nation “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” Nation is both a political as well as a cultural concept. ‘Nation’ is a cultural identity shared by the population. It gave rise to nationalism, which in turn led to the concept of ‘nation-state’. While ‘nation’ is a cultural entity and ‘State’ a political identity, the term ‘Nation-state’ is a politico-cultural concept. National identity in terms of socio-politico-economic conditions has been defined from the beginning by pioneers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Post-1980s novelists follow Salman Rushdie and seek to give an identity to Indian English fiction, that would distinguish it from Third World fiction – particularly African, Caribbean and Australian fiction. Indian English writers – both living in the country and abroad – write about the country and the society for the benefit of double audience (native and foreigners). Their novels portray characters who move both the worlds – India and abroad. That ascertains our national identity and makes it intelligible to the outsiders.

Chapter II

Reconfiguring Cultural Studies and Postcolonialism

In Chapter II, “Reconfiguring Cultural Studies and Postcolonialism” an attempt has been made to define culture in the light of theories available in the west. Cultural Studies owes its origin to two important books titled, The Uses of Literacy (1957) by Richard Hoggart and Culture and Society (1958) by Raymond Williams. Cultural Studies probes into the impact of culture on society and literature. The migratory movements of people (also writers) from the erstwhile colonies to UK and USA brought the concepts of postcolonialism and culture studies together. This resulted in the use of terms like ‘migrancy’, ‘hybridity’, ‘marginality’, ‘subaltern’, ‘diaspora’,
“resistance”, “identity”, “power”, “nation-state”, “hegemony” among others that are common to both postcolonial and culture studies. Culture Studies and Postcolonialism have been reconfigured by the Third World writers to produce authentic indigenous literature in the closing decades of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century.

Chapter III

National Identity and Cultural Representation in *The God of Small Things*

This chapter aims at analyzing the text in the light of cultural theories and postcolonialism. In order to contest the western view of nationality, references are made to Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* to explain Indian national identity. According to Nehru, it was the strength of our culture that helped us to survive the onslaught of colonialism. The cultural identity subsumes the subalterns who seek their identity within a stratified society. The novel, *The God of Small Things*, is explained in the light of Subaltern Studies. The socially excluded like Velutha and Ammu are wiped out from the face of the earth for loving each other. Their love, between a Paravan and an upper caste woman, disgraced the Kerala society in the nineteen sixties and seventies. The social life was largely controlled by the politicians, police and landlords, and hence despite its highest literacy rate, the downtrodden faced a humiliating condition in Kerala and so also in the rest of the country. An attempt has been made in this chapter to show how Roy reconfigures ‘Nationalism’ and ‘Culture’ in the context of the novel.

Chapter IV

National Identity and Cultural Representation in the Novels of Kiran Desai

An effort has been made in this chapter to explain Desai’s fiction in the light of critical theories. Kiran Desai’s first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) is a satire on the blind superstitious and credulous nature prevalent among the rural Indians. A failure in life, Sampath Chawla emerges as the ‘Monkey Baba’ taking advantage of the innocent nature of the people of Shahkot. Kiran Desai’s second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* presents the politically disturbed Kalimpong of 1980s which saw uprising for a separate Gorkhaland. By writing about indigenous people of
their homeland, the postcolonial writers like Kiran Desai create an alternative history and seek to re-create national identity through cultural representation of characters.

Chapter V

Conclusion

In the last chapter “Conclusion” an endeavour has been made to re-define nationalism and place Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai on the map of Indian English Literature and Third World Literature. Like all the Third World fiction writers, Roy and Desai are conscious of their roots. The desire to get back to their own culture, reminds us of their effort to place the global and the local side by side. Both Roy and Desai allow their characters to move both the worlds – the East and the West. It is part of the postcolonial writing which terminates in the neo-colonial writing. It is a matter of pride for India that both of them won Man Booker Prize for their novels.
APPENDIX B

LIST OF MY PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE THEME OF THE BOOK

—. “Women Booker Laureates of India.” The Critical Endeavour. XIV (May 08) (Special Number of Indian English Literature): 90-99.