

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN ANITA DESAI'S THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA

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Abstract

*In the novel *The Village by the Sea*, the researcher explores the influence of double consciousness (hybridity) over Hari, the protagonist, who suspends between rural and urban culture. He is enslaved by the illusion of financial prosperity in his dreamland, Bombay. His illusion results from cultural hybridity—a byproduct of postcolonial society. Hari and his poverty-hit family are the inhabitants of Thul—a village on the western coast of India. His family comprises of an alcoholic father, a sick mother (suffering from TB) and their four children, including his sister Lila. Hari and Lila are compelled to bear responsibility of earning bread and butter for their two younger sisters and mother whilst their father does not take their care. The study uses particularly Edward Said's *Orientalism* as theoretical modality as it argues that the colonial discourse defines the urban as being superior and the rural being inferior. Hari, the protagonist moves to the metropolitan city, Bombay as he thinks his economic prosperity is not viable in the countryside.*

Key Words : Hybridity, consciousness, contradiction and Orientalism.

Set in the postcolonial era of India, the novel unveils hybrid consciousness of Hari, a twelve-year-old protagonist. He drifts between two cultures: the rural and the urban. He does not find economic prosperity in the rural area. However, he sees betterment of his family condition in the urban area. His dream of bettering his family condition in the urban side drives him to Bombay. He is in dilemma. On the one hand, he is emotionally attached to the village and the life style of Thul. On the other, he observes his financial growth in Bombay. He experiences double consciousness which W. E. B. Dubois defines as, “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (3). Dubois believes that an individual gets suspended between his/her origin and new experience. Hari faces the similar condition by being aware of the suffering in his village the possibility of having better life in Bombay. Hari forced to earn money to look after his family members as father is chronic alcoholic and mother suffers from TB.

The protagonist decides to quit his school in order to look after his family members. He makes plan to earn money to free his family from financial burden imposed by postcolonial scenario. For his mission, he gets support from his elder sister, Lila: “She [Lila] had given up going to school long ago, so that she could stay home and do the cooking and washing and look after the others. She got up to start” (8). They cannot not afford medicines for their mother . . . Lila had given up school long ago and stayed at home, did marketing, cooking, and washing . . . undertakes responsibility as a mother and takes care of her two sisters—Bela and Kamal. (12-13)

Lila, like Hari, bears double consciousness—rural and urban. Like urban people, she believes that only money can lift her family from poverty. Unlike Hari, she embraces her rural values: “But he [Hari] no longer fished, he had sold his boat to pay his debts, her mother was too ill and weak to get

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out of her bed, and it was Lila who came to begin the morning with an offering of flowers to the sea” (3). The influence of hybridity can be observed in the activities of both Lila and Hari as defined by Robert Young:

Hybridity in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse: it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure. There is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity; it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes. (27)

Hari and Lila, the descendants of the colonized, struggle for their existence by reclaiming their ancestral past as quoted by A. Jacobs, “The concept of hybridity implies postcolonial effects that are no longer only unconscious byproducts of colonialist constructs. They are the creative remaking of the colonial past by the colonized in the service of a postcolonial present/future” (28). Like his colonized ancestors, Hari, the victim of self-centered urban values, compromises with urban life in Bombay for his survival. Hari views Bombay as his dreamland to drive away his poverty: “Bombay! He stared out of the window at the stars that shone in the sky and wondered if the lights of the city could be as bright, or brighter. It was a rich city: if he could get there, he might be able to make money, bring home riches, pieces of gold and silver with which to dazzle his sisters” (45). Hari feels his all worries will end the moment he steps into Bombay. He does not see any prospect in Thul for himself and his poverty-stricken family: “Everything belonged here, everything blended together—except for himself. With his discontent, his worries and his restlessness, he could not settle down to belonging. He knew in his heart that he would leave one day. Thul could not hold him for long—at least not the Thul of the coconut groves and the fighting fleet” (60).

However, Hari finds Bombay in contrast to what he dreams of it. He is disappointed to observe the penury and plight of Bombay residents. He gets a job in Jagu’s Eating House: “the shabbiest and the cheapest restaurant Hari had ever seen under the layers and layers of grime and soot with which the walls were coated. The ceiling was thick with cobwebs that trapped the soot and made a kind of furry blanket over one’s head. The floor and the wooden tables were all black, too” (146). He is shocked to see the dilapidated slums made of tin, rags and plastic sheets: “All the rain and slush and mud from outside had crept in the door and through the cracks in the walls and the ceiling as well. In fact, the mud was awash with rain water and debris it brought along . . . family was huddled on a string bed as if it were a raft” (115). Hari’s dream of rich life in Bombay get shattered. His illusion of city life gets dispelled as he learns that poverty does justice to both village and city.

Hari finds stark contradiction between rustic life of Thul and artificial life of Bombay where, “the incessant sounds coming from factories, honking of horns, and the rubbing, squeaking and cracking sounds of the machineries penetrate through the ears” (74). Far from the maddening urban crowd, Thul has, “the birds flying out of the shadowy, soft-needled casuarina trees and the thick jungle of pandanus, singing and calling and whistling louder than at any other time of the day. Flute voiced drongoes swooped and cut through the air . . . it was the voice of the village Thul as much as the roar of the waves and the wind in the palms” (9).

However, Hari suffers from colonial psychology that accepts the notion that the colonizers are superior to the colonized. The colonial discourse creates hierarchy between the urban (colonizer) and the rural (colonized). The rural are treated as irrational, barbaric, and primitive. Likewise, the colonizers define themselves as sophisticated beings by imposing their values over the rural people:

“I’m not the factory, ‘the man laughed. It’s not going to be just one factory anyway-it is going to be a whole city of factories. Factories, housing colonies, shopping centers, bus depots, railway heads, engineers and workers-a whole city is going to be built here” (61). India still suffers from the colonial legacy left by the East India Company. Colonizers in the guise of Indian citizens work in Bombay even today to accomplish their mission.

Colonizers create a tool called Orientalism to look into the Easterners. The concept of Orientalism creates a hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized. This notion divides the East and West derogatively. East is viewed as irrational, immoral and barbaric. In Edward Said's view: ". . . Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3).

In the name of civilizing mission, the Westerners colonize the East and expand their rule. The colonial discourse defines the urban as superior whereas the rural as inferior. Thus, colonial mentality always projects the urban as intellectual, superior, civilized masters of the world and apostle of light and the rural as degenerate and inferior. However, the colonized cannot assimilate into new culture created by the colonizers to dominate them. In the story, Hari is projected as inferior individual because he is a villager. People well settled in Bombay are viewed as superior as they dwell in city. The relationship between the urban (colonizers) and the rural (colonized) is defined by asymmetrical power relationship between them. The power exercised over the colonized is defined and created by the colonizers to rule over them. The asymmetrical notion of power that divides between rural and urban culture generates the sense of hybridity among people like Hari. The greenery picture of urban life and desolate scene of rural site creates in-between situation among the colonized. Likewise, the superiority of new culture especially urban one dominates people from the rural area. Hence, Hari is under domination of the urban culture that attributes selfishness, individuality, self-centeredness, business, calculation, corruption and sexual perversion.

The post-colonial theory focuses various agendas like representation, hybridist, diaspora, nationalism, problem of migration and so on. Edward Said in his *Orientalism* claims: “the relation between occident and orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying of a complex hegemony” (5). Said avers that cultural discourse and exchange within a culture is commonly circulated, is not truth but only the misrepresentation. Urban discourses always outline images about the East and aim at ruling and dominating the Orient. In this way, the agents of representation always play a discursive and hegemonic role. In other words, the very essence of the notion of representation is desecrated by the vested interest of the urbane. It is the colonial mentality that creates twofold opposition to establish a relation of supremacy. Likewise, the novel illustrates a tension between the urban and native cultures.

Desai believes that the postcolonial culture embodies hybridity in its nature. The sense of hybridity creates double consciousness by accepting and rejecting two different cultural values respectively. Hari, the protagonist, bears double consciousness by accepting urban values and rejecting rural traits. Generally, pure cultural values rarely exist in the world. Realizing such cultural impurity, Desai’s novel tries to project cultural hybridity that determines the consciousness of the characters. However, the author tries to recognize the significance of native culture. Desai celebrates hybridity that results from unexpected combinations of cultures, ideas, and politics: “the struggle over this symbolic heart

of empire piece of real being locked out of one of the most rapid and dramatic periods of restructuring and properly speculating ever seen in the city and its surrounding” (Jacobs 38).

Hari receives watch-mending training from Mr. Panwallah. The training motivates him to carry his life in his own village. As a result, he returns to Thul being fully convinced that the poverty-less city life is just an illusion. He starts a poultry farm and a watch-mending shop in the village and reunites with his origin: “The wheel turns and turns . . . and how birds and men were united in this great turning of the wheel, and how the birds, if we understood them, could show us and teach us many important things” (257).

Thus, Hari is a by-product of the postcolonial cultural hybridity. He is heavily influenced by double consciousness—suspending between the rural and the urban. However, his late realization of the importance of his village frees him from his childhood illusion to some extent.

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