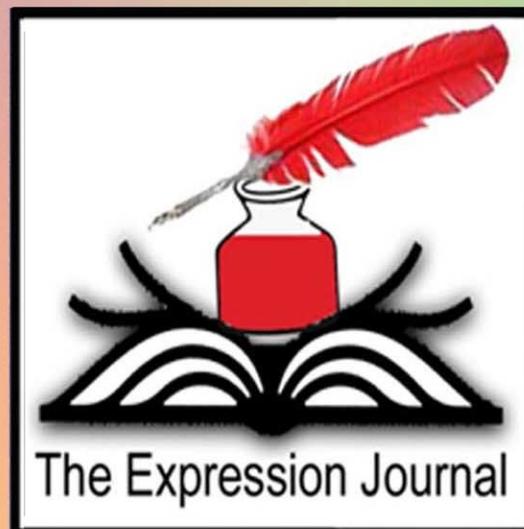


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SITUATING MARXO-FEMINIST PRAXIS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS* AND ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

Marxist criticism is based upon the premise of base and superstructure. People's social interactions are related to the manner they lead their material life. Feminism is the literary criticism that foregrounds the position of women in the society, the way she is reflected in the literary texts. Both the novels, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* satirize power politics of the mighty dominating the weak. The protagonists of these novels are the victims of an elitist mind that treat them on the basis of skin colour caste and job. The language employed in the selected fiction is also shaped by the societal influences including cultural norms and context. An attempt is made in this paper to analyse Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through these perspectives.

Keywords

Marxism, Feminism, Postcolonial, Dark, Light.

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Introduction

Literary theories like Postcolonialism, Marxism, feminism, postmodernism bind the ethico-political potential of literature with the social, political and the cultural of the contemporary discourse. Marxist criticism is based upon the premise of base and superstructure. People's social interactions are related to the manner they lead their material life. Marx developed a concept of class and of the capitalist mode of production. He developed these in *The Communist Manifesto*, *the Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital*. Marx argues that the capitalist mode of production is characterized by the use of labour power as a commodity to create more value. The capitalist compensates the labourer enough for his labor power to reproduce the commodity. The worker is exploited when he does not keep or control the value created by his own labour power. Marx argues that the capitalist system forces people into one of two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Feminism is the literary criticism that foregrounds the position of women in the society, the way she is reflected in the literary texts. It aims to create the social structures based on equality of both sexes. An attempt is made in this paper to analyse Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through these perspectives.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* received the prestigious Booker Prize at the fag end of the twentieth century and created a storm. Both the selected novels are dotted with numerous Marxist elements as the matrix of them is the socio-economic fabric of our developing nation. Feminist flavour of *The God of Small Things* arises from the depiction of the oppression of

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patriarchal hegemony which the author has tried to contest via her women characters. Hence the term, Marxo-feminist.

In the novel, *The White Tiger*, Adiga uses the backdrop of present day India to depict the fall of values in Indian life through the story of the protagonist. The story of Balram Halwai is narrated through a letter addressed to the Chinese Premier. It brings out the facet of India Shinning which is over shadowed by the glory and fame achieved by the IT entrepreneurs. The novel is an attack on the cheerful and false notion of a new transformed India. As a political analyst and social scientist Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* gives a very insightful and satirical presentation of the Communist hypocrisy in the political dynamics of Kerala.

Gender and Class Conflict in *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger*

Sunita Agarwal asserts:

India is emerging as a prominent power in the globalization world. Indian economy, science and technology, its democratic political system, its social and cultural heritage, its social kinship- all speak of its rapid progress. The glitter and glamour of the nation shines on the world map. But behind this bright shine there are still billions of people who are deprived of the basic necessities of life, who are leading a life of stark penury, who are illiterate and exploited and oppressed, who are treated like animals leading a life of servitude, who are discriminated on the basis of caste and class. They have a different world altogether and they always aspire to rise in their life and cherish a desire to be treated at least like human being. (149)

Although in the novel Roy does not blame EMS directly for this hypocrisy, her satire is motivated towards his Communist malignity through his Marxist followers, like Pillai, the local leader and the trade unionist of the Ayemenem; Chacko, the owner of "Paradise Pickles and Preserves" and a self proclaimed Marxist and Velutha, a sincere card holding member of the Communist Party. Adiga brings to contrast the disparity between progressive Indian cities and regressive Indian villages. The novel is centered on Balram Halwai, the son of poor rickshaw puller, Vikram Halwai. He is the strong voice of underclass in which the subalterns, landless laborers, unemployed youths, poor auto drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figures. The narrator of the novel, Balram Halwai, the white tiger, as Joshi says "is a typical Fanonian rebel who can go to any extent to get liberation" (100). Frantz Fanon in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, rightly observes: "there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist" (5). Hence, for eliminating the oppressor, violence and even killing become necessary in this revolt against oppression and subjugation. Fanon further asserts, "violence is cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them and restores their self-confidence" (51). Balram wanted to cast off his slavish life which he and his family members were leading since times immemorial. Under the influence Fanonian spirit he revolts against the oppression of his master and finding a proper occasion assassinates him.

Comrade KNM Pillai in Roy's novel is the chief of the Ayemenem unit of the Communist Party. He is a sincere party leader of the locality and wants to project himself as the leader of the poor working class people. For this he leads different demonstrations of workers with

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different types of demands. But he is not an extraordinary leader above the abilities of the common man. In his character there is the combination of temptation, greed and lust as it makes him to commit errors like other common people in life. The vital aspect of his character reveals how he is extraordinarily clever and knows how to turn out a particular situation for his political advantage. Roy describes him as, "He broke the eggs but burne the omelette" (281).

Adiga explores and exposes the inequalities between India's aggressively consumerist urban elite and the deprived rural poor. It shows what happens when people from these two classes collide and collude with each other. Thus, the economic system decides the nature of social relations. The economic base engenders various social institutions and systems as, education, law, governance and politics. These regulatory systems arising out of the base are known as the superstructure of the society. Halwai is the white tiger, a rare creature that comes once in a generation. He makes an unlikely journey from the darkness of rural India to dubious entrepreneurial success. Poverty degenerates, the victim becomes victimizer because he has no other choice. The two nuances and paradoxical points, where India of Darkness and India of Light meet and overlap are depicted in the novel in masterly way. The emerging new India is pivoted on the division between the haves and have-nots with moral complications. As Krishna Singh asserts:

The novel gives the detailed accounts of the Indian society-rural as well as urban and its various facets. Laxmangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and Banglore are generic and represent the portrait of India. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflicts, superstition, dowry practice, economic disparity, zamindari system and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless labourers, rise of Naxalism, corrupt education system, poor health services, tax evading racket, embittered master-servant relationship, prostitution, weakening family structure, entrepreneurial success and its fallout constitute the basic structure of Indian society which largely forms the dark image of India. (97-98)

Self proclaimed Marxist character Chacko, in *The God of Small Things* happens to be a man with capitalist mind and outlook. He is a hypocrite and a lecherous character and takes Marxism as a style statement, not as a way of life. His father Pappachi swears at his excessive leftist arguments and takes special pleasure to call him Karl Marx. Marxism is a kind of social hobby for him and he does not feel any compulsion to use it in his personal character or behaviour.

Patriarchy is made up of structures or institutions that exclude women from participation in, or contact with, spaces of higher power, or what are believed to be the spaces of greatest power economically, politically, culturally and religiously. Jean Bethke Elshtain is concerned that many Marxist feminists undervalue the 'family' in a capitalist context. Families, in her opinion foster and encourage diversity and provide vital support to young children. Marxist feminists respond that they are in complete agreement that the family should be preserved but the family as an economic unit should be destroyed along with capitalism. Alison Jaggar takes a critical approach against Marxist feminism because it does not say enough about how women are oppressed by men in particular. Alison states that Marxist feminist thought lumps women together with men, both being oppressed by the capitalist system. Socialist feminism arouse out of a dissatisfaction of the

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gender-blind Marxist thought which included the thought that women's oppression was far less important than worker's oppression. Socialist feminists are most active in socialist revolutions and women's economic movements, on welfare, women in development, and women in the 'global factory'.

Roy successfully demonstrates the injustice inflicted upon women through the means of patriarchy, caste taboos and love-laws. She regards that inequality and subordination of women is an instrument of the social structure. The narrative unfolds the subjective politics which has ordered the subjection of women in a man-owned world. This novel exposes the violence imposed on women and how Ammu got victimized by the patriarchal society. She thought that after marriage she would be able to make herself free from parental tyranny and therefore she agreed to marry. But suffering had been pulling Ammu down for long. She became domesticated depriving of privacy and freedom. Even after marriage the fate of drudgery followed her. At last finding no solution to avoid her drunken husband Ammu returned to father's home where 'she had no position at all' and falls in love with Velutha in search of happiness but in vain. Adiga focuses only on the dark aspects of Indian society. In the novel, Balram says:

You see, a total of ninety-three criminal cases for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping and many other such minor offences-are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment. Not easy to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are currently in jail but continue to be ministers. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money. (97-98)

In cities, like Delhi in which servants have to go wine shops for their masters once a week, Balram says, "If we came after eight o'clock on a weekend night to Jackpot, it was like a civil war in front of the counter" (74). The rich lead a luxurious life, but there are some people in urban India who yearn for food. Even some helpless people have to live without food. In big cities, some poor people pick the left food from the dustbins like animals. Outwardly, urban India looks very shining. It has good roads, big mansions, everywhere lightening, and shines like European countries, but the ground reality is very harsh in urban India. The rich lead a luxury life, but the rest generation who are poor, leading a miserable life in Indian cities. Behind these big mansions, there are tiny slums which are always ignored; the residents of these slums live in the darkness in these shining cities.

Both the selected works are the literary expressions rooted in the common social behaviour of India. There is a clear link between the literary work and the social reality as in Marxist terminology of which feminism too is a part.

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