



THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE WINNING NOVELS : A STUDY IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The Man Booker Prize is a prize for fiction in English. It is founded in 1969 and is financed by Booker McConnell, a multinational conglomerate. It is awarded annually by a panel of judges for what, in their opinion, is the best full-length novel published in the last twelve months. The award is accompanied by considerable publicity and media razzmatazz. The winner of the Booker Prize is generally assured of international renowned and success for this reason; the prize is of great significance of the book trade. The prize worth 50,000 GBP to the winner and each short listed author receives 2500 GBP in addition to a leather bound copy of his own book.

INTRODUCTION

In a long span of time from 1969 to 2012, we have five famous Booker Prize winners related to India or Indian Diaspora. They have evaluated the greatness as well as the weakness of Indian culture, civilization, and life boldly. These highly renowned novelists are- V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Arvind Adiga. The novels of these writers, who either belong to India or Indian origin have almost similar themes—migration, homelessness, and loss of Identity. In almost all the cases, Diaspora keeps a sense of displacement.

‘Diaspora’ as an expression and experience has extended its terms, conditions and effects beyond imagination since the Post Second World War period. Now, it stands for all migrations, settlements, journeys, and movements. Voluntarily or forcibly, people from different communities shift from their homelands into new regions, across the world, both from the Third to the First World and vice-versa. However, the experience of migrancy and diaspora also produces various problems and aspects of journey and relocation in new lands

e.g. displacement, un-belongingness, discrimination, banishment, identity crisis, cultural clashes, yearning for home and homeland etc. In fact pathetic but distinct feature of diaspora people is that in physical and material space, they live in a particular country but in imagination look across time and space to another. As Robert Cohen remarks:

“... acknowledge that the old country-a nation often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore- always have some claim on their loyalty and emotions.”¹ Thus migrants to Mr. Rushdie “straddle two cultures . . . fall between two stools.”²

Swaraj Raj has been aptly marked the tensions and ambivalences of diasporic consciousness:

“... curious accretion of homing desire and a state of homelessness; a state of belonging and the awareness of not being able to belong; the contradictory pulls of the nostalgic longing for the home behind and the desire to feel at home in the new dwelling; and the discrepant centrifugal pull of staying at the margins of the centre to maintain cultural difference and the centripetal seductions of assimilations in the adopted culture.”³

It is always seen in diasporic imagination that home remains almost a mythic place of origin and of radical lack. And as Avtar Brah states: “The concept of diaspora places the discourse of home and dispersion in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origin.”⁴ These above mentioned issues and tensions have been explored and challenged in most of diasporic discourses from multiple approaches. Besides it, “Home has become such a scattered, damaged, precarious concept in our present travails,”⁵ says Rushdie. Kiran Desai’s diasporic experience is also bitter because more than twenty years time, she has spent in West; however, she still holds on its Indian passport, struggling to get American citizenship. Desai is Indian citizen but a permanent resident of America. Increasingly she, too, is unsure that she would really want to surrender her Indian citizenship. Kiran Desai reacted sharply in an interview:

I feel less like doing it every year because I realise that I see everything through the lens of being Indian. It’s not something that has gone away – it’s something that has become strong. As I’ve got older, I have realised that I can’t really write without that perspective.”⁶

Actually, for the young and talented people, migration proves to be a Garden of Eden. Developed countries like U.K and U.S.A. invite the scholars to contribute their genius mind in the progress of their country and pay them a huge money and comfort. But sometimes migration leads to frustration, homelessness, and loss of identity.



Mr V.S. Naipaul, in full Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul (born August 17, 1932, Trinidad), is a Trinidadian writer of Indian descent. He is known for his pessimistic novels set in developing countries. For these revelations of what the Swedish Academy called suppressed histories, Naipaul won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001. “To be strange is to be foreign, alien - a stranger is a person whose home is elsewhere.”⁷ In other words, an outsider. In the case of the Trinidadian writer, V.S. Naipaul, this definition, taken from the *Chambers Dictionary*, is particularly apt. Naipaul, through a quirk in history, is a stranger, if not a foreigner, in his native Trinidad, as he is a third generation **immigrant** from India. Thus it is difficult in Naipaul’s case to define that elsewhere which is home. As the word home is inevitable linked with identity, it is commonplace to remark that the Nobel laureate’s work often centres on what has frequently been called an identity quest. If identity is what differentiates individuals, a displaced person is an individual who for some reason lives in a country or society other than his/her own.

Descended from Hindu Indians who had immigrated to Trinidad as indentured servants, Naipaul left Trinidad to attend the University of Oxford in 1950. He subsequently settled in England, although he travelled extensively thereafter. His earliest books (*The Mystic Masseur*, 1957; *The Suffrage of Elvira*, 1958; and *Miguel Street*, 1959) are ironic and satirical accounts of life in the Caribbean. His fourth novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), also set in Trinidad, was a much more important work and won him major recognition. It centres on the main character’s attempt to assert his personal identity and establish his independence as symbolized by owning his own house. Naipaul’s subsequent novels used other national settings but continued to explore the personal and collective alienation experienced in new nations that were struggling to integrate their native and Western-colonial heritages. The three stories in *In a Free State* (1971), which won Britain’s Booker Prize, are set in various countries; *Guerrillas* (1975) is a despairing look at an abortive uprising on a Caribbean island; and *A Bend in the River* (1979) pessimistically examines the uncertain future of a newly independent state in Central Africa. *A Way in the World* (1994) is an essay like novel examining how history forms individuals’ characters. Naipaul’s other novels include *The Mimic Men* (1967) and *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987).

Among Naipaul’s nonfiction works are three studies of India, *An Area of Darkness* (1965), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990); *The Five Societies—British, French, and Dutch—in the West Indies* (1963); and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981). Naipaul was knighted in 1989.

In 1998 he published *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, a portrayal of the Islamic faith in the lives of ordinary people in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. *Half a Life* (2001) is a novel about an Indian immigrant to England and then Africa. He becomes half a person, as Naipaul has said, “living a borrowed life.”⁸ Released the year that Naipaul received the Nobel Prize, *Half a Life* was considered by many critics to



illustrate beautifully the reasons that he won the prize. Subsequent works include *The Writer and the World* (2002) and *Literary Occasions* (2003), both collections of previously published essays. The novel *Magic Seeds* (2004) is a sequel to *Half a Life*. In *The Masque of Africa* (2010)—which was based on his travels in Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa—Naipaul returned to his exploration of religion, focusing on African beliefs.

Salman Rushdie, in full Ahmed Salman Rushdie (born on June 19, 1947, Bombay [now Mumbai], India), is an Anglo-Indian writer whose allegorical novels examine historical and philosophical issues by means of surreal characters, brooding humour, and an effusive and melodramatic prose style. His treatment of sensitive religious and political subjects made him a controversial figure.

Rushdie was the son of a prosperous Muslim businessman in India. He was educated at Rugby School and the University of Cambridge, receiving an M.A. degree in history in 1968. Throughout most of the 1970s he worked in London as an advertising copywriter, and his first published novel, *Grimus*, appeared in 1975. Rushdie's next novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), a fable about modern India, was an unexpected critical and popular success that won him international recognition. A film adaptation, for which he drafted the screenplay, was released in 2012.

The novel *Shame* (1983), based on contemporary politics in Pakistan, was also popular, but Rushdie's fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, encountered a different reception. Some of the adventures in this book depict a character modelled on the Prophet Muhammad and portray both him and his transcription of the Qur'ān in a manner that, after the novel's publication in the summer of 1988, drew criticism from Muslim community leaders in Britain, who denounced the novel as blasphemous. Public demonstrations against the book spread to Pakistan in January 1989. On February 14 the spiritual leader of revolutionary Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, publicly condemned the book and issued a fatwā (legal opinion) against Rushdie; a bounty was offered to anyone who would execute him. He went into hiding under the protection of Scotland Yard, and—although he occasionally emerged unexpectedly, sometimes in other countries—he was compelled to restrict his movements. Despite the standing death threat, Rushdie continued to write, producing *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), a collection of essays and criticism; the children's novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990); the short-story collection *East, West* (1994); and the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). In 1998, after nearly a decade, the Iranian government announced that it would no longer seek to enforce its fatwā against Rushdie. He later recounted his experience in the third-person memoir *Joseph Anton* (2012); its title refers to an alias he adopted while in seclusion.



Following his return to public life, Rushdie published the novels *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001). *Step Across This Line*, a collection of essays he wrote between 1992 and 2002 on subjects from the September 11 attacks to *The Wizard of Oz*, was issued in 2002. Rushdie's subsequent novels include *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), an examination of terrorism that was set primarily in the disputed Kashmir region of the Indian subcontinent, and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), based on a fictionalized account of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The children's book *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) centres on the efforts of Luka—younger brother to the protagonist of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*—to locate the titular fire and revive his ailing father.

Rushdie received the Booker Prize in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. The novel subsequently won the Booker of Bookers (1993) and the Best of the Booker (2008). These special prizes were voted on by the public in honour of the prize's 25th and 40th anniversaries, respectively. Rushdie was knighted in 2007, an honour criticized by the Iranian government and Pakistan's parliament.

Aundhati Roy, full name **Suzanna Arundhati Roy** (born on Nov. 24, 1961, Shillong, Meghalaya, India), is an Indian author, actress, and political activist. She is also best known for the award-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) and for her involvement in environmental and human rights causes.

Roy's father was a Bengali tea planter, and her mother was a Christian of Syrian descent who challenged India's inheritance laws by successfully suing for the right of Christian women to receive an equal share of their fathers' estates. Though trained as an architect, Roy had little interest in design; she dreamed instead of a writing career. After a series of odd jobs, including artist and aerobics instructor, she wrote and co-starred in the film *In Which Annie Gives It to Those Ones* (1989) and later penned scripts for the film *Electric Moon* (1992) and several television dramas.

The films earned Roy a devoted following, but her literary career was interrupted by controversy. In 1995 she wrote two newspaper articles claiming that Shekhar Kapur's film *Bandit Queen* exploited Phoolan Devi, one of India's most wanted criminals in the early 1980s and a heroine of the oppressed. The columns caused uproar, including a court case, and Roy retreated from the public and returned to the novel she had begun to write.

In 1997 Roy published her debut novel, *The God of Small Things* to wide acclaim. The semiautobiographical work departed from the conventional plots and light prose that had been typical among best-sellers. Composed in a lyrical language about South Asian themes and characters in a narrative that wandered through time, Roy's novel became the biggest-selling book by a non-expatriate Indian author and won the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction.



Roy's subsequent literary output consisted mainly of politically oriented nonfiction. She published a collection of essays, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), and several books, including *Power Politics* (2001), *War Talk* (2003), and *Public Power in the Age of Empire* (2004). In recognition of her outspoken advocacy of human rights, Roy was awarded the Lannan Cultural Freedom Award in 2002, the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004, and the Sahitya Akademi Award from the Indian Academy of Letters in 2006.

Dr. N.D.R. Chandra writes: "Arundhati Roy's works are not autonomous creation of an autonomous artist. Her works are cultural artefacts to be read and understood by applying method of 'thick descriptions' as suggested throughout her novels and essays, myriad events are described which give us a glimpse of social, cultural, and political life in contemporary India."⁹

In addition to her literary work, Roy was active in various environmental and human rights causes. She led efforts to prevent the construction of dams in Narmada, and her work was chronicled in the documentary *DAM/AGE* (2002). Roy later drew criticism for her vocal support of Maoist-supported Naxalitein surgency groups.

Kiran Desai, (born on Sept. 3, 1971, New Delhi, India), an Indian-born American author, whose second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) became an international best seller and won the 2006 Booker Prize.

Kiran Desai—daughter of the novelist Anita Desai—lived in India until age 15, after which her family moved to England and then to the United States. She graduated from Bennington (Vt.) College in 1993 and later received two M.F.A.'s—one from Hollins University, in Roanoke, Va., and the other from Columbia University, in New York City.

Desai left Columbia for several years to write her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), about a young man in provincial India who abandons an easy post office job and begins living in a guava tree, where he makes oracular pronouncements to locals. Unaware that he knows of their lives from having read their mail, they hail him as a prophet. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* drew wide critical praise and received a 1998 Betty Trask Prize from the British Society of Authors.

While working on what would become her second novel, Desai lived a peripatetic life that took her from New York to Mexico and India. After more than seven years of work, she published *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Set in India in the mid-1980s, the novel has at its centre a Cambridge-educated Indian judge living out his retirement in Kalimpong, near the Himalayas, with his granddaughter until their lives are disrupted by Nepalese insurgents. The novel also interweaves the story of the judge's cook's son as he struggles to survive as an



illegal immigrant in the United States. *The Inheritance of Loss* was hailed by critics as a keen, richly descriptive analysis of globalization, terrorism, and immigration. When she received the Booker Prize for the novel in 2007, Desai became the youngest female writer to win the award.

Krishna Singh writes:

“Kiran Desai... explores colonial neurosis, multiculturalism, modernity, immigrants’ bitter experiences, insurgency and the game of possession, gender-bias racial discrimination, impact of globalization and historical relationships between people from different cultures and backgrounds.”¹⁰

In 2006 Kiran Desai became only the second Indian woman to win the Man Booker prize for her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. She is also won National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. The daughter of distinguished Indian novelist Anita Desai, Kiran Desai is at the forerunner of a new generation of Indian writers in English exploring themes of globalization and exploitation in 21st century India. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, was published in 1998 and received great compliments from such notable figures as Salman Rushdie. It went on to win the Betty Trask Award, a prize given by the Society of Authors for the best new novels by citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations under the age of 35. In September 2007 she was a guest on Private Passions, the biographical music discussion program hosted by Michael Berkeley on BBC Radio 3. In May 2007, she was the featured author at the inaugural Asia House Festival of Asian Literature.

Her epoch making book, *The Inheritance of Loss* is set in the North-eastern Indian state of Kalimpong of the 1980s, the hotbed of communal politics within a nation-space that has evolved a conglomerate of discourses from a unique combination of “the old days of colonization and new age of globalization.”¹¹

The narrative captures the political milieu in which identities are negotiated through a continual collision of institutionalised national narrative with minority narratives as its discontents. The institutionalised national narrative is still in the grips of its colonial and postcolonial legacies but wishes to fall in step with globalisation for its seemingly plausible vision of opportunities for all; the minority narratives, on the other hand, emanate from the scepticism about this vision and raise the ethnic call for Gorkhaland for Nepalis. Desai’s novel suggests that the global call for melting borders that became the political statement of the Indian nation in the last quarter of the 20th Century also created its reactionaries in the localised spaces of the land, and the contending forces generated narratives that challenged not the phenomenon of globalisation per se but the politics of exclusivity that invariably conditioned the country’s vision of melting borders. Krishna Singh writes about **The Inheritance of Loss**:

“The novel is essentially a study of losses- loss of culture, loss of identity, loss of human relations, loss of emotional binding, loss of human values, loss of rationality, loss of peace and harmony, and loss o human beings’ faith in each other etc.”¹²

Arvind Adiga, born in Madras in 1974, grew up in Mangalore and studied at Canara High School, then at St. Aloysius High School, where he completed SSLC in 1990. After immigrating to Sydney with his family, he studied at James Ruse Agricultural High School. He studied English Literature at Columbia College, Columbia University in New York. Adiga began his career as a financial journalist interning at the Financial Times. His major works are: *The White Tiger* (2008), *Between the Assassinations* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011).

The White Tiger is the debut novel of Mr. Adiga. It was first published in 2008 and won the Booker Prize for the same year. The novel studies the contrast between India’s rise as a modern global economy and the main character comes from crushing rural poverty. Other themes touches on include corruption endemic to Indian society and politics, family loyalty verses independence, religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims, the experience of returning to India after living in America, and the tension between India and China as Asian superpowers. Arvind Adiga himself remarks that,

“At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society(Indian). Adiga commits that what he is trying to do- it is not an attack on the country but it’s about the greater process of self-examination.”¹³

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