



The Images of Male Characters in the Booker Prize Winning Indian Male Novelists

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Abstract

There are two male Indian novelists, Salman Rushdie and Aravind Adiga who bagged the much coveted literary prize in English i.e. is the Man Booker Prize or commonly known simply as the Booker Prize. When Salman Rushdie first published *Midnight's Children* in 1981, no one could have imagined that it was a great turning point to be for the Indian novel in English. The sheer energy, the innovations in the English language, form with postmodern, postcolonial and political themes have stunning impact on the readers all over the world. All this led Salman Rushdie to win the Booker prize and to be the first Indian novelist to get this award. The novelist's high imaginative quality, his unconventional word play, the disarranged syntax and spirited metaphors, the stunning fusion of oral narrative, history, fiction, non-fiction, journalism, fantasy, realism and the stream of consciousness are worth mentioning.

Another male writer who won the Booker prize is Aravind Adiga. He won the 40th Booker prize for his debut novel, *The White Tiger* in 2008. The novel provides a dark humours perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world. The novel is told through a retrospective narration by Balram Halwai, the chief protagonist. It deals with hero's journey from Laxmangarh to Dhanbad and from Dhanbad to Delhi where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, where he flees after killing his master, Ashok Sharma, and stealing his money.

Midnight's Children has the male characters in profusion. The major male characters in the novel are Saleem Sinai, his grandfather Adam Aziz, Saleem's putative father Ahmed Sinai, Shiva and William Methwold and the commoners are Lifafa Das, Ramram Seth, Tai, Mian Abdullah, Nadir Khan and Homi Catrack, whereas Adiga's *The White Tiger* moves ahead with a single major male character Balram Halwai. The minor male characters are the four landlords, the Stork, his brother the Wild Boar, the Raven and the Buffalo. Ashok and Mukesh are Stork's sons. Kishan is Balram's big brother and Dharam is his nephew. The

other commoners are the driver Mohammed who disguised himself as Ram Parsad and the Nepali watchman Ram Bahadur.

The story of *Midnight's Children* covers an extended world especially the subcontinent of India. The protagonist, Saleem describes India and the various governments succeeding from time to time in a very remarkable way. Saleem's collective experience is the epitome of the history of the nation before and after partition. The birth of Saleem is a unique event in the novel. He was born at the exact moment of the birth of India as a free nation. The novel seems to be the projection of the lives of the various characters in the situation which is full of struggle and conflict. *Midnight's Children* presents the struggle of a man, who is the victim of time and place and it is not easy to locate him in the fabricated society. The hero, Saleem Sinai fights against the corruption, violence, poverty, political uncertainty, religious hatred and orthodoxy.

The identity of Saleem's biological parents is held in suspense. Saleem, who is supposed to be the son of Ahmed and Amina is not their real son. He happens to be a child of the poor Wee Willie Winkie and Vanita. Vanita has a sexual intercourse with an English man, William Methwold and gives birth to a bastard named Saleem. After the delivery at nursing home, the nurse Mary exchanges Saleem with Shiva, who along with him was born at midnight of 15th August 1947, by Amina.

In the novel the reader is presented with alternative view of human characters. Saleem is the central consciousness and all characters move around his central psychic state. They move into two worlds the real and unreal. Some characters in the novel like Parvati and Ramram Seth possess supernatural powers. The male characters in the novel are mostly inactive and impotent and they serve as caricatures. Saleem Ahmed Sinai, Aadam Aziz and Nadir Khan are sometimes given to dream and hallucination and are found to be unreal but they have real life connotations.

The novel presents an alternative view of human character as the sum total of social and political circumstances. M.K. Naik comments on the tradition of this novel: "It is a multi-faceted narrative, which at once an autobiographical bildungsroman, a picaresque fiction, a political allegory, a typical satire, a comic extravaganza, a surrealist fantasy and a daring experiment in form and style (Naik,2004:39). The male characters are grappling with the concept of nation, race, history, politics and community. The hero sustains many identities. He carries the expectations of the common people and tensions and paradoxes of Independence. Saleem remains a great story teller like Shaherzade of Arabian Nights and

Padma his beloved is the hypothetical Shaheryar type listener. As the author points out through Saleem: "...just as Scheherazade, depending for her very survival on leaving Prince Shaheryar eaten up by curiosity, used to do night after night! I'll begin at once: by revealing that my grandfather's premonitions in the corridor were not without foundation" (Rushdie:24-25). There is close resemblance between Saleem and Ganesh because of his long nose. He also casts himself as Vishnu or Brahma.

Thus Saleem, the principal male character has been problematized. He appears to have a bundle of contradictory feelings and emotions. He is sometimes playful and sometimes serious. He moves in the world of fancy and imagination but does not seem to be unreal character. He remains the confluence of world religion and represents multicultural and multi-religious Indian.

When Saleem's body disintegrates, Shiva his alter-ego becomes powerful. Shiva another important male character embodies the force of devastation and chaos. He is the genetic son of Ahmed and Amina. As stated by Saleem: "Thanks to the crime of Mary Pereira, I became the chosen child of midnight, whose parents were not his parents, whose son would not be his own ... Mary took the child of my mother's womb, who was not to be her son (Rushdie: 157). He has been raised in extreme poverty. Shiva in his violent action bears close resemblance to Hindu Puranic God of destruction. As Saleem falls into pieces metaphorically, the Nehruvian dream of secular India shatters into pieces and the divisive forces of religion, caste and regionalism become uppermost. Shiva becomes Indira Gandhi's henchman. He finds himself elevated in social status and gets the position of Major in Indian army. He represents the dispossessed multitudes of the poor people for whom ideology and order are valueless. He destroys Saleem and other midnight's children. He is a notorious seducer and a great womanizer. Shiva also destroys Parvati the female character in the novel. By making illicit relation with her she bears a bastard who is named Aadam Sinia. She becomes an adoptive child of Saleem and Padma.

Another major male character is Aadam Aziz. He is a German educated doctor. He is secular and liberal Muslim. He is a progressive Kashmiri who rejects ancestral ways in favour of modernity. The westernized culture induced in him the hate for his native culture and his religion. He hates his wife, Naseem for being too much religious. He dislikes his wife's observing of veil (hijab). Through his male character Aziz, Rushdie presents major historical events of pre and post Independent India. Though Dr. Aziz is westernized in his

style, his heart is infused with patriotic feelings. These feelings transfer into Saleem and his mother Amina.

Ahmed Sinai, another male character is the putative father of Saleem. He is also a progressive and secular Muslim who prefers India to Pakistan after partition and settles in Bombay but later the harsh circumstances force him to migrate to Pakistan. He is an alcoholic and a debaucher. He deceives Alia by breaking the promise of marriage and marries her sister Amina. He dies in the bombing done by Indian Air Force in the 1965 war.

Rushdie presents the theme of colonialism through his male character, William Methwold. He is a symbol of evil and degeneration. He is an Englishman, who like his ancestors practices the divide and rule policy. He is a proud man and has a domineering personality. He seduces Vanita and makes illicit relation with her as a result, Saleem is born to her.

Beside these major male characters we have commoners. Tai is a minor male character. He is the most fascinating commoner. He is a boatman. He chatters non-stop, spins grand and fantastic stories from child Aziz. He has wonderful relationship with him until the adult Aziz returns from Germany as a fully qualified doctor. He is an orthodox man who opposes the meeting of Dr. Aziz with Naseem, daughter of landlord Abdul Ghani. He is short tempered. He does not have a bath for months. He is a boastful old man. He speaks politely and uses decent language. Beside him Lifafa Das, Mian Abdullah, Nadir Khan and Homi Catrack are usual minor male characters.

In Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai, the chief protagonist mocks at Indian democracy. Balram points out the defects in Indian social, religious and political system to Mr. Wen Jiabao, the former Chinese Premier by writing epistles to him. According to Balram after more than seventy years of freedom the country has no basic civil amenities. People here lack discipline, courtesy and punctuality. The materialism has substituted moral values. Balram is a very ambitious lower class man. He is a brave man who breaks the shackles of slavery. He is aggressive and dynamic. He has immense entrepreneurial skills. His behaviour towards Hindu mythological figures is mocking and insulting. He is an unspiritual atheist with Marxist view. He writes epistle to Chinese Premier. First he invokes gods in a derogatory way: "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 grand total of 36,000,004 divine arses for me to choose from" (Adiga:8). Though he

was good in the beginning, the harsh circumstances make him corrupt, cunning, opportunist, usurper, debaucher and selfish. He calls himself half-baked because he like millions of Indian children is never allowed to complete his school education because of their poverty. His struggle is to come out from the darkness of poverty to reach the glamour of wealthy life. For achieving his goal he uses the wrong means and finally kills his master and flees to Bangalore with seven lakh rupees. He plays various roles from a servant of a tea shop to a car driver to an entrepreneur. Finally he settles in Bangalore and applies his theory of equality to all classes. Adiga highlights the sheer poverty, bribery from Grampanchayat to Parliamentarian level. We can understand the motif of the novelist from his interview: “Where’s this shining India, everyone talking about? It was time someone broke the myth. At night they sleep together, their legs falling one over the other, like one creature, a millipede. Men and boys sleep in another corner of the house”(Nona Walia,2008:11). He uses derogatory language against Hindu gods vehemently. For him religion is opium. He is against the social hierarchy. For him it is like a rooster’s coop. He breaks it and becomes a free man. He is a reformer and criticizes the dowry system. He presents himself as a social engineer and pours down heavily on the corrupt behaviour of politicians and public servants. A man feels guilty of his sins but Balram does not repent over his act of murdering his master instead he feels proud of it. He exonerates his act by saying that one murder was necessary to break the age old servitude and humiliation at the hands of rich people. He justifies his act by explaining that he has done it to do something for poor people.

The other male characters in the novel are four landlords each got his name from the peculiarities of appetite that had been detected in him. The first one is the Stork. He is a fat man with a fat moustache. He owns the river that flows outside the village, and he takes a cut of every catch of fish caught by fishermen and toll from every boatman who crosses the river. His brother is called the Wild Boar. This fellow owns all the good agricultural land around the Laxmangarh. The third one, the Raven owns the worst land, which is the dry, rocky hill side around the fort and he takes the cut from the goatherds who go to graze with their flocks. The fourth one is the Buffalo the greediest of all. He is paid by poor rickshaw pullers for using the roads of the village. They have to pay one third of their income to him. All the four animals like men live in high-walled mansions. Their children are sent to Dhanbad or Delhi. All the four men are money sucker they live on the income of the poor villagers. They all exploit them and behave with them like slaves. The four landlords remind us the old slavery system. They are worse than selfish pigs. The Stork has two sons Mukesh and Ashok. The

Stork's two sons are different from each other as night and day. Mukesh is short dark and ugly and very shrewd and cunning. He has his father's mind while Ashok is tall and handsome like a landlord's son should be. Mukesh, like his father is very cruel, hard-hearted, mean, selfish, unsympathetic, prejudiced and communal.

The Stork is so partial that he dislikes his grandson calling himself Azheruddin while playing cricket. He asks him to call himself Gavaskar instead of calling Azheruddin. Mukesh is very miser. He even asks Balram to look for one rupee coin which he loses in the car after paying two million rupees bribe to the Great Socialist. He always misbehaves with Balram and treats him inhumanly. Ashok is quite opposite to him. He is polite and gentle. Though Ashok is kind, he is also miser like Mukesh. He does not do any substantial thing to make Balram financially sound. He always takes the side of Balram whenever Mukesh scolds him. Ashok is educated in America and marries an American lady, Pinky Madam. His wife does not like the ways his family live. The smooth life between Ashok and Pinky takes a disastrous turn when Pinky leaves him and returns to America. Her departure disturbs Ashok. He begins to visit pubs and does heavy drinking. He begins to make contacts with his old beloved Usha and other prostitutes. Thus Ashok becomes corrupted inwardly as well outwardly.

The author is anxious about the growing communalism in India. He portrays it through a minor male character Ram Parsad whose actual name is Mohammed. He hides his religious identity and poses himself as a Hindu for getting a job of a driver at Mr. Mukesh's home as the latter is an evil and prejudiced man. In order to please his masters he begins his day with prayer chanting 'Om' and bowing in front of at least twenty pictures of various gods. Balram catches him red handed going to a mosque in the month of Ramdan. After this incident he leaves the job and Balram becomes the driver number one at Mukesh's home.

Kishan is also a minor male character. He is elder brother of Balram. He plays big brother's role in shaping Balram's career. After the death of their father both Kishan and Balram leave Laxmangarh and go to Dhanbad where they work at a tea-shop. Kishan gets married after one month of his mother's death. He gets five thousand rupees cash, a Hero bicycle plus a thick gold necklace in dowry. Kishan is a simple man with no entrepreneurial skills like Balram. He submits himself before the existing system of class and caste distinction. He has no big ambition like his brother. He has no deep social sense. He is much obedient to his granny. Unlike Balram he is much careful about the granny and other family

members. Balram always worries about his brother's exploitation at the hands of his family and the rich landlords of the village.

Conclusion

The novel is a political satire. Adiga highlights on the growing corruption and communalism in Indian politicians. The novelist ridicules the politicians and Indian democratic system through his male characters, the Great socialist and his deputy Vijay the bus conductor of Laxmangarh. They are the most opportunist and volatile men. They are mean, greedy and selfish pigs. They make the hollow promises to the people before election. The Great Socialist always wins the election with the support of the four landlords of the Laxmangarh. They provide him funds in the election in return he provides them political shield to their unlawful activities and their illegal means of income. He helps them in saving the government taxes by putting control over the Income Tax department. These landlords who threaten the villagers all the time do the sycophancy and flattery before these politicians for their personal gains.

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