

Babeş-Bolyai University
The Faculty of Letters
Doctoral School of Linguistic and Literary Studies

DOCTORAL THESIS

**Childhood with Anglo-Indian Writers:
Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Hanif Kureishi, and Kiran Desai**

ABSTRACT

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Cluj-Napoca, 2022

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Keywords: postcolonialism, childhood, marginal, dominance, subordination, subaltern, identity, racism, childhood trauma, child development.

Abstract

Postcolonial cultural studies focus on alienated, underprivileged, marginal cultures and collective identities whose evolution was controlled by an exterior power, the colonial empire. This new approach springs from the historical and cultural realities of the countries emerging from a colonial past. The birth of postcolonial theory has given the opportunity to analyse the impact of the colonial rule over the colonized people. Postcolonial theory deals with the texts of the former colonials and their descendants. These texts are manifestations of the colonized as resistance against the colonials. Postcolonial theory has become the project of rethinking and reclaiming history and literature as experienced by the colonized people.

Edward Said criticizes the West's perception of the East as a land of romance and the exotic, inferior and ignorant, with no interest in development. After the independence, the picture of the Orient changed and postcolonial subaltern voices have begun rewriting their history.

Gayatri Spivak talks about subaltern women facing oppression and being silenced. The colonizers relied on the idea of subordination to impose their domination. In the colonial society, the resistance against subordination manifested in strikes or refusal to embrace the colonizer's rules. Spivak's idea is that colonial subordination is so terrible that the oppressed woman no longer has the strength to even tell her story, just as the victim of sati can no longer tell her story, only the individuals who witness the ceremony can share it.

This thesis analyses the presence of children as important actors in their own right in Anglo-Indian novels. Their development is affected by colonialism. Their voices talk history for those who were vulnerable to racism and shame and who were the victims of displacement, and identity loss as a result of living in-between cultures. Children are a metaphor of their country and their memories are testimonies about the colonial society. They also shed light on the idea of childhood, identity, and infantile development in colonial and postcolonial times.

Various scholars have revealed the importance of childhood and trauma in human development. Melanie Klein was a pioneer of child psychoanalysis. She explored children and infant development. Cathy Caruth studied trauma with children and believed trauma is a metaphor for the limitations of language, and history functions as a link for people's common trauma. Christa Schönfelder deals with childhood and family trauma and the marginal position that childhood and women trauma have occupied in historical trauma. She raises awareness of how internal and external forces disrupt families and how trauma fiction presents a conscious attention to language and narrative. Henry Krystal focuses on the distinct features of childhood trauma such as the development of automatic anxiety (a condition characterized by the child's incapability of controlling his impulses) and believes that children experience trauma more intensely than adults in colonial times. This interfered with their psychological development. Myron Weiner's book *The Child and the State in India* is an analysis of the effects of poverty in postcolonial India and children development, and raises awareness on child labour and the lack of compulsory education. Carolyn Sttedman considers that individual identity is deeply connected to childhood. Finally, David Lloyd connects trauma to postcolonialism and analyses the effects of violence and racism in the colonized world, while Anna Mae Duane writes about status of children in society.

Postcolonial novels have contributed to giving voice to the colonized. The plot is a representation of the world the (post)colonial authors come from and it unfolds the destinies of the oppressed and the dominant relationship between the empire and the colony. Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Coolie*, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* deal with children characters severely affected by colonialism and postcolonialism. Children become representative voices of the marginal and provide details of disturbing aspects of the impact of colonialism in their society. Their testimonies of suffering and oppression are a reflection of their society and life conditions. These four highly regarded writers may differ in style and approach, but their main focus is the same: shedding light on colonial and postcolonial issues, namely the relation between the centre and the margin and the impossibility of the Indian margin to overcome the dominant discourse of the centre, and present the impact colonialism had on Indian children. The children characters from these novels are a metaphor of the troubled society they live in. The authors shape their characters relying on their personal experience and the way they perceived society. They themselves, as children, were affected by colonialism.

Indian children suffered more than racism. They faced sudden cultural change, economic exploitation, malnutrition, and poverty. They were forced to accept the colonizer's culture and ideology.

The four novels I have chosen for my analysis point to oppression, inequality and injustice, displacement, hybridity, racism, shame, exoticism, the search for identity, and the struggle to improve one's condition in society. The novels reflect on the experience of being born in a rigid caste system, in a patriarchal society, which promotes inequality, both between the rich and the poor, and between genders. Children are victims of the rigid system and have a difficult time adjusting to society, either as hybrids in other countries, or living according to Imperial ideology in (post)colonial India. Some characters wish to improve their condition by all means while others focus on finding their true identity. They are a metaphor for the society they live in.

Gender is an important construct which cannot miss in the discussion of post-colonial childhood in India or elsewhere. Judith Butler provides insights on the complex connection between identity and performance, while Arif Dirlik shows how class and gender are fundamental principles when organizing human groups. Anne McClintock talks about constructions of gender power and how marital laws restrict a woman's status in society and force her to subordinate to a man through marriage. Postcolonial literature provides an overview of the gendered stereotypes and cultural aspects of India and the (post)colonial time.

To conclude, the thesis focuses on childhood and (post)colonial children, a theme I have chosen because it has not been analysed independently before. The development of children in (post)colonial time requires a special attention, as the colonial rule had a great impact on children's lives, both in colonial and postcolonial time. After the Independence, Postcolonial India is a young state, despite the historical tradition of Indian culture. Colonialism disrupted the normal evolution of India from a political, cultural, and linguistic point of view. Hence the connection between children and childhood, postcolonial topic in general, and India in particular.

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