



**After “Postcoloniality”: Exploring the Nexus between Nation-State and
Global Capitalism**

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Abstract

The genesis of Nation-state and capitalism argues Arun Ghosh has deep seated connection. Both were born around the same time and in fact both systems heavily relied on each other for their survival. However, increasingly one can witness that post-colonial fiction speaks of national borders being just “shadow lines”. What does that mean for capitalism? With transnationalism and Globalization becoming urgent realities do national borders really recede? Are we truly postcolonial in terms of being after colonisation? Or has corporate capitalism ushered a renewed form of neo-colonialism?

Key-words: nation-state, capitalism, globalisation, *The God of Small Things*, *Midnight's Children*, postcolonial, neo-colonialism

Introduction

The debates in nation-state, nationalism and its ties with globalisation and neo-liberal capitalism have acquired a new sense of urgency with anti-national resistance movements breaking out around the globe. This gives us an opportunity to once again scrutinise the condition of being postcolonial in all its facets and reflect over its critical heritage. Postcolonial theorists such as Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee who have widely and variedly conceptualised on the origin and persistence of the nation-state thus seem an appropriate point of reference.

Where Benedict Anderson, defined the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” Partha Chatterjee critiques the totalizing hint in Anderson’s work by questioning “whose imagined communities?” Where Anderson and Chatterjee’s postulations untangle the categories of nation and national, Masao Miyoshi discusses the increasingly palpable impact of the transnational. He makes interesting observations on the plethora of MNCs and TNCs in the contemporary world. He goes on to argue that these corporations especially the transnationals lead to the collapse and liquidation of the category of the nation-state and perpetuate colonialism which is “even more active now in the form of transnational corporatism.” Also, Chris Harman to whom this essay will refer extensively theorises about what he calls “trans-state capitalism”.

At the heart of this paper is the discussion of the nexus that exists between the economic system of capitalism and the political-cultural system of nation-state. Although this paper begins by addressing questions concerning the interdependence of nations and capitalism on each other and the safety valve that nations become for capitalist endeavours, it shall not shy from hinting that the emphatic pronouncement of the imaginative status of the nation and its mythological boundaries gives an unchecked gateway to transnational capitalism.

The genesis of both, nation-state and capitalism, have had parallel development since both grew during the rise of colonial enterprise. As Arun Ghosh maintains “The concept of a nation-state not only evolved at the time when the capitalist system started growing, the idea was in fact actively promoted by the owners of capital.” This paper states to reflect, on how indebted the nation-state is to capitalism and vice versa, how the two operate simultaneously funding each other in terms of both capital and authority and what this relationship means for the already depleting environment and restructuring of city spaces. As the paper progresses, the very idea of “postcoloniality” will be called into question and concerns of freedom, of independence subjected to questioning.

Nation state: Creating an Atmosphere Conducive for Capitalism

State backed capitalistic intervention has been the sub-theme of many postcolonial fictions. It has however gone unaccounted for in the face of canonization of other thematic concerns that appear ostensibly urgent. Numerous texts such Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* explore the corrosive impact of the culture of market conscious and market driven democracies.

For instance, in *The God of Small Things* the commercialization of the History house as well as the polluted landscape of Kerala provides one of the many instances of the nexus between market and capitalism on one hand and nation and governments on the other. *The God of Small Things* is set in Kerala and narrates the catastrophic story of a family. The narration is marked by the use of colloquial language and an absence of any sequential or chronological order. The story centres on 8 years old twins, Esther and Rahel who find themselves caught in the complicated and fatal network of caste politics, social inequality and personal vendetta.

Roy paints an interesting picture of Kerala when in the very first few chapters she depicts Rahel visiting Ayemenem after multiple years, as a grown up 31 year old woman.

Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed. Both things had happened. It had shrunk. And she had grown. Downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby. The barrage regulated the inflow of salt water from the backwaters that opened into the Arabian Sea. So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice—for the price of a river. (124)

Similarly, while describing Esther's experience of strolling on the familiar yet unfamiliar streets, Roy writes "Some days he walked along the banks of the river that smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans."(13)

Arundhati Roy captures the depleting ecological scape of the state and gestures towards the involvement of a capital reaping government. The comment on "World Bank loans" highlights the façade that globalisation is, portraying the latter as a thin veil for economic and

ecological plunder. Katja Losensky expands on the same in her brief study. She quotes these very lines from the text, and in a subsequent remark, adds that “the changes in India’s agricultural sector to a more market-oriented approach have been and are still highly supported by the World Bank, the WTO and multinational firms. Under the smokescreen of liberalization of trade very few global players control the market”. (4)

Thus, Arundhati Roy highlights the distressing effects of this very state accented capitalism and commercialization. The transition of the History House into a five star restaurant also stands testimony to the aforementioned trope of neo-colonisation and state approved commercialization. Where Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* hints towards unchecked capitalism that has dire consequences for the ecology of Kerala, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* foreshadows how spaces are today reorganised according to the “capital rhetoric of development and modernity.”

Midnight’s Children is a 1981 book which uses magic realism to narrate the history of the Indian subcontinent. This history however finds its map on the body and mind of its lead protagonist namely Saleem Sinai. As the dream of a liberated democratic Indian nation crumbles, Saleem Sinai’s fortunes mimic its demise. The book which is divided into three parts paints and critiques multiple historical events ranging from the creation of Bangladesh to the emergency period under Mrs. Gandhi. One such instance furthers the end of this paper to explore how a city is not a natural entity but is continuously remodelled according to dominant discourses.

In *Midnight’s Children*, the passing episode in the chapter titled “All India Radio” where Mr Narlikar is thrown into the ocean by the “language marchers” highlights the trend of “land reclamation in Bombay”. Dr Narlikarin *Midnight’s Children* is a gynaecologist who finds in his

technological invention of tetrapods and birth control a solution to the problem of overcrowding. In a turn of events that is typical of Rushdie's writing Dr Narlikar manages to upset a mob who are worshipping the tetrapod as a symbol of Shiva. He is consequently thrown in the ocean by the very same mob or the "language marchers". The spatial reorganisation that Dr Narlikar is unable to complete is taken over by the Narlikar women "who later extend their sprawling business empire to the real estate sector, owning the high rises of Malabar Hills on the reclaimed land, which replaces the quaint villas of Methwold Estate." The episode per say is not as pertinent to the immediate concern of the paper as is the remark by Madhumita Roy and Anjali Gera Roy who write,

In Rushdie's novels, the episodes connected to land-reclamation in Bombay illustrate that materiality of space is also a product of socio-spatial activities and a result of contestation of multiple interests – those of its inhabitants and of outside and impersonal agencies of spatial restructuring. The latter, in the globalized world, is also often the space of the corporatized capital rhetoric of development and modernity rapidly encroaching the lived space of the developing nations of the global south with relative ease.

Thus, although *Midnight's Children* does expose the constructed nature of spaces it does not take into account the involvement of Corporatized capital that is state orchestrated. However, this can be attributed to the book's location in pre liberalization India. Spatial restructuring by Corporatized capital has found its most vocal expression in the feisty development of Gurgaon post liberalization. Thus, where Arundhati Roy's book takes account of the ecological plunder that is characteristic of the neo-liberal capital affirming world, Salman Rushdie's writings

foreshadow the spatial restructuring that has accompanied the advent of multinationals and their close ties with government.

The Inheritance of Loss by Kirandesai is another text that purports to open interesting questions about labour, nation and global capitalism. The story of Biju is a story of a working class man who finds he is struggling with stringent immigration laws while he is stuck in America where he goes to chase the great American dream of money and success. Paromita Chakrabarti in her essay “Narratives of Despair: Globalization, Diaspora and Transnational Labor in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” asks interesting questions about borders, nations and capital when she (while commenting on the labour condition in *The Inheritance of Loss* says) says “Although national borders get trampled and are rendered irrelevant when it comes to capital flows, people’s movements across it are policed with extraordinary vigilance and considerable violence.” A chain of questions thus open: Do national borders really get “trampled” to facilitate “capital flows”? Does capital rely on the state for its free flow? Does the state really disappear with multinationalism or does capital become deterritorialized and decentred?

Trans-state Capitalism and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

As far as the dependence of capitalist entrepreneurs and corporates on Nation-state is concerned, Neil Lazarus makes an interesting case on the relationship between the two. He draws on Chris Harman’s argument wherein Harman posits that the capitalism-nation relationship far from disappears with multinationalisation. Multinationalism argues Harman does not imply the disappearance of state but rather an incorporation of more and more states to the rule of capitalism.

The giant company does not end its link with the state, but rather multiplies the number of states- and national capitalist networks- to which it is linked. The successor to state capitalisms is not some non-state capitalism (as is implied by expressions such as “multinational” or “transnational capitalisms”) but rather a capitalism in which capitals rely on the state as much as ever but try to spread out beyond it to form links with capitals tied to other states- perhaps best described as “trans-state” capitalism. (72)

Human lists four functions that a state performs in order to facilitate the corporates, furthering the end of capitalist discourse. The four functions that the state performs are essential to our discussion of this phenomenon of the relationship between the two. The first and foremost of these functions is “the guaranteeing of supplies of skilled labour power and of some degree of protection of local markets”. The most colloquial Indian example of this phenomenon is the mushrooming of call centres. It is the young labour force that is targeted which has developed a culture of night duties and easy money. Secondly, “the orderly regulation of commercial relations with other capitals and the provision of a stable currency” are also up to the state. In our context institutions such as SEBI and RBI are established for such a cause to meet its end. Thirdly, steps are taken by the national governments “to protect firms against the sudden dangers presented by the collapse of large suppliers and customers” and fourthly, “the provision of military might as a last resort protector of interests.” The fourth phenomenon of the state can be best explained by referring to an episode in Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his phenomenal work of postcolonial fiction *One hundred years of solitude* powerfully renders true this relationship between Capitalism and Nation-State. The reference to Banana Plantations is exemplary in furthering the argument of the nexus

between capitalism and Nation State. The Banana Plantations are set up in Macondo and the workers are made to work under unhappy working conditions. The workers unite against the government as well as the corporation and organise a strike. A peace agreement is announced and the 3000 workers and their families are called for what only appears to be peace deal. Instead, the army surrounds the people and opens fire. Under the false pretext of an agreement, what is perpetuated is a massacre. Jose Arcadio Segundo, the only survivor of the incident, returns to the town which knows nothing of the shooting. The government circulated lie that no one died in any incidence of blatant violence is believed by the people. This episode has its genesis in real instance of violence perpetuated by the state to protect the interests of the capitalists. In 1928, a US corporation called the United Fruit Company did not even wince, before subtly urging the Columbian army to open fire on a worker's strike. Thus, this kind of state orchestrated violence over corporate enterprise is not merely a fictional account. Also, the incidence has consequences for environmental cycle as well. After the corporation begins operating the ecological system of Macondo is disturbed and there are instances of extreme rainfall or unbearable heat. In fact this ecological plundering is one of the many setbacks of the nexus between capitalism and nation state that go unaccounted for.

Post-colonialism or Neo-colonialism?: A Case for an Altered Mode of Study

This foray into the surviving relationship between the entity of nation state and capitalism is more than just an exploration of corporates today. The course charted out through this paper purports to ask some questions by this venture. If colonialism was a time of economic, territorial and cultural plunder then by the direct involvement of market oriented mother countries then is the condition today any different? Barring the territorial possession western policies still seem to be regulating what happens in the Indian economy. In fact most of the transactions are

completely divorced from what the common man defines as real. Sensex, shares, foreign exchange are what decide the path a nation-state takes. How far did commonwealth games (a legacy of colonial enterprise itself) inculcate a spirit of sports culture in the city? It was clearly not more than another shot at inviting foreign exchange and aiming at higher GDP.

The follow up question that we need to ask is then, was there ever a moment of postcoloniality? And if there was one, did it not as quickly fade into neo colonialism. Did we not move from colonialism to neo-colonialism in terms of a movement from territorial dominance to an economic one? Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani in their essay “Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, ‘Postcoloniality’ and the Politics of Location”ask similar questions,

In what senses are we now situated ‘after’ ‘coloniality’, and now? In what senses are we situated after coloniality in the sense of coloniality being over done with? What about the colonial is over and for whom? This is not a rhetorical but a genuine question. For it seems to us that, in relation to colonialism somethings are over, others transformed, and still others apparently unreconstructed. What by the way happened to neo colonialism in all of this talk of the colonial and the post? In short what do we too hastily elide when we involve the post-colonial especially as an ity as a condition, state, way or form of being spread evenly over an area without specifies borders or unevenness or contradictions?
(276)

Perhaps there is a need for an introduction of an altered mode of study, where post coloniality is studied as a subunit under neo colonialism and not vice versa since neo-colonialism is the modern day reality. The celebratory spark attached with the position of the post-colonial then becomes a position that needs to be critiqued.

Secondly, the corporate culture and its subsequent attack on the ecological balance cannot be ignored. Gurgaon is exemplary in our argument. Gurgaon would never have gone through the kind of industrialization and development it did had it not been for the pressures of the corporates on the government. The haphazard development of the town has led to manifold problems of extreme polarities that oscillate between either water logging for the urban dwellers or drought for the nearby villagers. In this money game that's essentially played between the government and corporates, it's not just the common people who are losing but also the ecology that's suffering from gross plunder.

Conclusion

Where one has to be wary of the nexus that exists between nations/ democracies on one hand and neo-liberalism on the other, postcolonial literature that exalts a world without border does not seem to have the potential of truly understanding transnational capitalism. Excessively one witnesses postcolonial texts that look at the fluidity of boundaries and identity. For instance, where *The English Patient* celebrated for its post national sentiments, *The Shadow Lines* as the name suggests pits borders as mere shadow lines. One wonders how enabling a politics it is to cast nation-state as impotent spectators as they can perform the function of the last check on a decentred capitalism. As Masao Miyoshi while warning against the potential of trans-state capitalism suggests that multinational corporations liquidate the category of the nation-state and perpetuate colonialism which is "even more active now in the form of transnational corporatism." Perhaps in a scenario such as this one needs to politicise the category of Nation-state once again to develop strategies that are more in sync with our late capitalist realities.

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