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THE ANXIETY OF INDIANNESS" IN G.V. DESANI'S ALL ABOUT H. HATTERR

English

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ABSTRACT

G.V. Desani's post-independence work, All About H. Hatterr and its linguistic codology has been discerned to comprise nothing slighter than a political critique of the departed colonizer. The American novelist and short story author, Joshua Cohen reckons All About H. Hatterr as "one of the most original novels of Empire's decline." Salman Rushdie has decreed: "Hatterr's dazzling, puzzling, leaping prose is the first genuine effort to go beyond the Englishness of the English language." This paper will examine Desani's utilization of language in the novel to desecrate the English and destabilize certain customary Eurocentric literary conventions.

INTRODUCTION

A Reading of G.V. Desani's All About H. Hatterr vis-à-vis Meenakshi Mukherjee's Observation About a Quintessential "Anxiety of Indianness" Existing in Indian English Writing

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay, 'The Anxiety of Indianness' envisages Raja Rao and G.V. Desani evincing the titular "Anxiety of Indianess" in their narrative modes. Mukherjee means by the phrase- "anxiety of Indianness" - the conscientious predilection in Indian English authors to write archetypal and idiosyncratically Indian content since otherwise they borrow a foreign language to write with. Indian English authors experience inquietude to typecast themselves as 'Indian' in an attempt to make atonement for their appropriation of a foreign language to write in. For the same reason, they about typically 'Indian' themes and deploy 'Indian' motifs, tropes, narrative techniques etc. In the case of Rao's Kanthapura (1938) such endeavors in the narrative mode seem to embody for Mukherjee an enterprise targeted not merely at an appropriation but at a literary-political recolonization of the colonist's language. Kanthapura has been noted to alloy the language of the colonizer as well as to sabotage Eurocentric generic conventions. This paper is going to examine another postcolonial novel, G.V. Desani's All About H. Hatterr (1948) that attempts an analogous literary-political critique directed against the English-both the language as well as some other facts allied with the West and how this critique of the West in a novel about India embraces Desani's "anxiety of Indianess." Desani, in a manner archetypal of his contemporaries, reinforces the East-West antagonism and by disparaging the West and their language through ostensively Western themes, tropes and characters exhibits an "anxiety of Indianess."

EXPOSITION

Through a Detailed Reading of the Novel

The protagonist of All About H. Hatterr-the Eurasian Hatterr is a creation of a miscegenated union-"fifty-fifty of the species"-he is the son of a Western Christian father and an Eastern non-Christian mother. "Hindustaniwalla Hatter"- Hatterr's name has its genesis in his headmaster's hat emblematizing a 'sahib' or 'topiwallah' connoting the European administrators in colonial India. Affiliation with the West in the protagonist's characterization is apparent and Desani's intent seems to be to ridicule the same. The miscegenated Anglophile Hatterr, for instance, can be seen as a burlesque of the Western, white and racially 'pure' male subject. Hatterr is a cross-national personage, an upshot of ethno-convergence and therefore, a mitigated version of the ideal and exalted Western-Occidental subject opined as the racial superior of his Oriental counterpart.

Furthermore, while Hatterr's full name is a synecdoche for East-West amalgamation-"Hindustaniwalla Hatterr"-wherein "Hindustaniwalla" is symbolic of the East whereas "Hatterr" of the West, its ludicrously outlandish sound might imply the oddity and unfeasibility of such an unproblematic and idyllic synthesis between the East and the West.

The novel delineates Hatterr's spiritual expedition entailing encounters with seven Indian sages who all turn out to be impostors. The fallacious Western assumption that India is a land of sages and mystics gets discredited.

M.K. Naik in 'The Method in the Madness: A Thematic Analysis of All About H. Hatterr' Perspectives on Indian Fiction in English glimpses the novel as a "comic" and an "inglorious odyssey," an account of "the half-tragic, half-comic autobiography of a half caste harlequin, the story of the hero's search for both self and a viable philosophy of living." The quasi-bildungsroman narrative and the theme of a lofty philosophical quest in the novel are thus lampooned.

Additionally, the novel also avers to be "The Autobiographical of H. Hatterr. Being also a Mosaic-organon of life: viz. A Medico-philosophical Grammar as to this contrast, this human horseplay, this Design for Diamond-cut-Diamond." Reminiscent of certain Western narratives, it seeks to accord knowledge that is magnolious, ethical, astute and idealistic. However, the entire undertaking of philosophical edification of readers is attenuated with the cognizance that the novel turns out to be a treatise teaching readers not insightful wisdom but the reprehensible doctrine of lex talionis, a "Diamond-cut-Diamond", violence in reprisal of violence principle through the means of Hatterr's voyage that betrays the kidology and subterfuges deployed by men to always beguile him and Hatterr's own retaliations thereof.

In Chapter II 'Versus the Impresario' a caricature of "Doktur Med. Freud" is presented through Mr. Bannerjee's advice to the celibate Hatterr: "You must attend to your libido, the elan vital. Otherwise, I very much regret, it will produce complexes in you." Freud's psychoanalytic remedy to the neurotic condition by bringing the repressed sexual instincts of the id to the conscious mind is travestied as a remedy that will be accomplished through untrammeled dissipation. Desani's ventriloquism through Bannerjee plays on a cardinal psychoanalytic term, 'sublimation': "Unless you sublimate yourself spiritually, your libido will make you have an actual quid pro quo conflict with your sub-conscious animal instincts." Sublimation in psychoanalysis is the process of transmogrifying socially deplorable desires into innocuous impulses. Bannerjee harbours odium for Freud: "I do not see eye to eye with Doktur Med. Freud. I disagree with Herr Jung. I am very moral.....Though the Vienna school regards the highest stage of misconduct, namely adultery, as natural libido action, excuse me, I disagree." Bannerjee repudiates Freud and Jung as depraved philosophers. The concept of 'libido' is as well satirized in Hatterr's mock-version that despicably alleviates and deliberately misconstrues significant psychoanalytic concepts: "In brief, for the information of the non-medical reader, I should say, that every human being has a libido. The Vienna school of medicine has discovered it. The libido is the master instinct to conquer the opposite in sex, and acquire there from untold satisfaction."

Amandeep Singh in 'Reintroducing All About H. Hatterr' professes, as regards the enormous codology of the novel: "Desani shares Joyce's interest in tweaking the English canon a bit irreverently." Singh remarks apropos the analogies observed between the novel and certain Western narratives averring that Desani purposefully decontextualizes, misappropriates and vitiates Shakespearean expressions. Introducing the Englishwoman, Mrs. Rosie to Hatterr, Bannerjee appropriates the genuinely tragic words of Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream when her father, Theseus is imposing marriage upon her: "Oh hell, To choose love by another's eye!" to asseverate that Rosie as a married woman is an improper match for Hatterr. Hatterr shall be debased in an ironic equivalence with Shakespeare's tragic heroine to the doom of having a mate chosen by someone else though the readers indisputably know better. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is assailed when Bannerjee describing Rosie states: "Unlike the ladies of the most high and plenty state of Rome, she has a strong will. She would not say to you, Oh, Romeo! Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?" Within the same context, we have a misplaced allusion to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Bannerjee responds to Hatter's vow of unscrupulous adultery in the words: "To sleep, perchance to dream! Aye, there's the rub! The Bard knew it." Hamlet's words: "....To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;" articulate Hamlet's deeply tragic yearning for death. Death is a "consummation Devoutly to be wish'd (that will end)....the thousand natural-shocks That flesh is heir to...." ceasing Hamlet's impasse and dilemma to choose between taking retribution upon his father's slayer or to commit suicide. Conversely, Bannerjee's allusion to Hamlet's words palliates the archetypal dithering of the tragic hero to a question concerning Hatterr's perfidious desire to escape a "lonely existence...." by indulging in adultery. The allusion is not an ennobled but a misplaced one.

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