



POSTCOLONIAL STRUCTURES IN THE BRAINFEVER BIRD

Mrs. N. Vijayakumari* Dr. D. Shanmugam**

*Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University.

** Associate Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University.

Irwin Allan Sealy is the recipient of literary credits too numerous to list. He is the finest prose-stylist of India. The world of Sealy is a realm of stylistic innovation, of formal experimentation and determined prose that straddles the artisanal and the artistic and, much like Pahari miniatures blurs the boundaries between the two. Sealy, born in 1951 in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, and schooling in Lucknow, went to La Martiniere School and then to St. Stephen's College, Delhi University for his higher studies. He is employed in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and America.

Sealy's genius of delineating and his creativity are conspicuous from his very first work *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988), which is magical narrative of seven generations of a dynasty. His second fictional work *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998) is wholly different in style where narration finds at its best. It seems as though the author of this is not Sealy himself. He is also the author of other fictional works *Hero: A Fable* (1991), *The Brainfever Bird* (2003) and *Red: An Alphabet* (2006).

The most influential novel of Sealy, *The Brainfever Bird* addresses the triangular love-story among Morgan, Lev, and Maya, traverses two cities – St. Petersburg, Russia and Delhi, India and happened in the present-day world of globally driven market forces, international borderline crossing and technological innovations. Sealy addresses an order of authoritarian intellectual centres and the hierarchies they grant rise to. These range from the authority of the author in order to back transparency of representation to the supremacy of paternal discourses and subject positions as well as cultural and racial hierarchies in postcolonial background. Therefore the love-story of Sealy serves as a narrative tool that infuses the postmodern scepticism in the meta-narratives that endure gender, class, racial or colonial discrimination.

The present paper attempts the argument that in *The Brainfever Bird*, Sealy through a postmodern intellectual revolution against authoritarian structures, whose obvious forms are class hierarchy, colonial racial, gender power and narrative realism creates an aesthetic that demands to admit the unsustainability and illusoriness of the belief of postcolonial India as a unified system.

The love-story of *The Brainfever Bird* presents three lead characters that all represent the traces upon them of different repressive power structures inferred from class, racial and gender discrimination as well as from colonial power. Sealy argues that the identity of the subject contains a varied complication such that a character can mean both the oppressor and oppressed, across a sort of genetic power structures.

Maya is a puppeteer who produces illusions through her puppet dramas; but as a character in the story she is also a puppet whose deeds are influenced by the Narrator/Author. This use of the puppetry concept drags spotlight to the meta-fictional examination of Sealy on the condition of novel in the context of the separation of differences between fiction and fact.

Maya has an apocalyptic dream that a lover is coming into her life; the man of her dreams will be tall. Maya's belief on dreams and on her vagabond puppet for suggestion and guidance darken the separation between the internal world of a character's dreams and a fictional external reality.

Maya produces puppets from all kinds of orts and keeps them in the puppets' cabin in her home, where they hang in three layers on one of the walls. She has a pet puppet, which she speaks to, named Babaji. The position of the puppet Babaji, which acts as her companion, also an art made by Maya, proposes a reciprocity in roles or agency that reinforces the meta-fictional artifice of a fictional subjectivity that both creates and is created by other works.

In one aspect, Maya symbolises a feminist liberation in a conventionally patriarchal background but she is also defended in this role by the privileged position of her father and mother, and her position in a class order that she reflects in her relationship with Laiq, the local Muslim barber. As born in the Jain sect, she has been schooled at Risingholme, a first-class Western-style boarding school in the foot of Himalayas and speaks Hindi and English (which is really her first language). Her father who is Chief of the Delhi Police, while her mother, who possesses the apartment block she resides in, dreams a traditional life for Maya, and is regularly annoyed by the idiosyncrasies of her independent, determined daughter.

Lev Repin, whom Maya fantasies into her life, passes over international boundaries with the motive of selling Russian defence secrets about biological warfare to the government of India. He is pressured to quit his job in Moscow as a scientist because he posed a security risk. With the downfall in his finances and status, he determines to attempt to be a spy. Yet, he



has been installed by the influential political forces, and landing in India, has his bag full of secrets robbed, though his suitcase stays in his custody.

Lev's hopes of bounce back as a scientist are ruined as he understands that he will not secure an appointment with Defence Ministry of India. Becoming passive to decline, he rather seeks a love-affair with Maya, who gives him feel alive for the first time in his life, but he by chance infects her with a virus that he has unintentionally brought from Russia. In Delhi, as he is an outsider and a promising spy, he becomes a target for a racial paranoia that confirms harming him with acid. In a conspiracy, he is immediately gone back to St. Petersburg.

Morgan Fitch is the third in the triangle love-story. He is a good-looking newsreader in television, with an image identified by masses. He frequently visits Maya's home at late night and stays over, sleeping on a single mattress in the living room. He is in love with Maya, but their affair is not sexually cosy. Though English is his first-language, he also talks in Hindi and is excited by a glorified Russia developed with his reading of Russian poems.

Morgan is an Anglo-Indian whose family has stayed in India for years, however still holds an Anglo-Indian identity. When Lev questions him whether "Morgan" is an Indian name, Morgan answers that: "It is now but it has taken three hundred years. My ancestors has come sailing from England? Can you blame him? Cold wet miserable little country" (156). The ancestral heritage of Morgan outcomes from the English control of India during which time both Indian and English races infringed cultural standards of interracial marriage. Yet, in the current situation, he is part of the cultural and racial difference that constitutes modern India. In the end of the story, he was killed on a travel to Russia as an outcome of racial paranoia, but his ancestry lives on through the baby that he and Maya have produced.

The Brainfever Bird's ambience is structured within a post-perestroika Russia and postcolonial India that makes an illusion of referentiality to a surface reality. Yet, what arises from the fiction of reality is the concept that there are only copies or reproductions, inclusive of a recycling of earlier texts that, in the context of postmodern duplicity, replicate a reflection of a non-existent external world even while refusing any mimetic portrayal. In this manner, the opposing pressure between portrayals of reality and non-reality dismantles since they are both asserted on illusory creations.

In *The Brainfever Bird*, there are traces of Sealy's adoption of meta-fiction with a textual connection between the fictitious characters and the puppets of Maya which become installed with a realism, in which the puppets are provided the same level of identity and reality as characters like herself. This provides fiction and the fiction-within-the-fiction the same status, which exhibits the duplicity of fiction-making. This duplicitous technique is illustrated in the following scene. Mrs. Jain, the exotic neighbour, meets Maya on the guise of providing her meal, while actually curious to know how Maya survives and who is with her. Mrs. Jain forces her way to the cabin of puppets, although Maya attempts to stop her.

The puppets, textual symbolic elements, are fed human feelings by Maya, who as a fictitious character is also humanized in the narrative progress. The legs denoting the incorrect path literally belong to Lev who is masking amidst the puppets, implying a gap in the portrayal of what is formulated, which admits for the interference of a varied perspective that of the viewer. Maya ridicules Mrs. Jain assuming that Lev is a churail, a ghost or witch whose feet are twisted backwards. Yet, it is Maya whom Mrs. Jain guesses is a witch. The attention of reader is drawn to the interaction brought about by the authenticity between characters and puppets, as Mrs. Jain is fascinated by the image of legs that she believes belong to a puppet but are the legs of one of the characters of novel. The responses and emotions of Mrs. Jain are provoked by a lifeless thing, indicating the active suspension of scepticism or a definite understanding of what she has viewed which reflects the own intellectual and emotional relationship of the reader in narrative progress.

With the inclusion of the narrative of Razia into the puppet play of Maya, Sealy might be historicizing the pursuit for woman power, emphasising that narratives of structural woman domination and of determined female leaders are not a postcolonial feminist import. They have their own textual criteria that relate to a particularly Indian context, which are not normally admitted in Western-influenced narratives about the East.

Razia is the first female ruler in Muslim history, chosen by her father, as successor to the Delhi Sultanate. The reference to Razia in the novel understands the significance of gender in discussion on hierarchic power structures, a point which is never concerned within imperialistic dialectics. She symbolises an imperative historical woman who is entangled in a structure of such tricky and forceful gender bias that she cannot make enduring change. Maya is also a powerful woman character, and even though she reveals female artistic power through her handiwork of the puppets and their scripts, there are greater cultural, religious and political structures and systems, leading which control the lives of Lev and Maya.

In *The Brainfever Bird*, Sealy examines the theme of infection through Lev who not only infects Maya with a virus that he incurred in Russia but also comes to India with the motive of trading biological warfare secrets to the government of India. Lev is entangled in the creation of Kurile-D, part of the Russian biological arms programme based on "germ warfare [which]



is the opposite of firebombing. It works from the inside out, in silence. It takes time” (30). Lev’s colleague, Meschersky slits his finger by mistake and becomes infected with the virus, dying a slow and horrible death. Biological warfare is less visible but wholly intrusive, and luckily the plan of Lev to sell such secrets fails. There is, yet, another weapon in the pretence of a plague that is discharged into Old Delhi seemingly with Indian governmental approval, which wiped out several people and created mass chaos. Gossips thrive that Lev is liable for the outbreak.

In vengeance for his alleged role in permeating the plague, Lev has acid-thrown at his face. Morgan brings him to clinic, but when he comes back with Maya to meet; Lev has escaped, sidetracked by an agent. Maya is puzzled and accuses Laiq. Yet, as the Narrator remarks: “But fear of the stranger is what it comes down to. Love of one’s own gods” (321). Preferably, it may be inferred as keeping one’s own boundaries protected. This is what may happen when two cultures, two races, come into connection: it may influence a structure of paranoia based on scare of what is inconceivable and different.

In *The Brainfever Bird*, Morgan and Maya holds a privileged places; Maya was born with wealth and upper-class status and her education helps to underline these. Morgan evolves from an underprivileged Anglo-Indian upbringing, but his education, and English as his first-language, helps him to acquire well-paid job with a high-public profile. The native healer and barber Laiq, who is Muslim, evolves from an even underprivileged social status, and while he should admit this, it is not without bitterness. Indian middle-class and the high-class have adapted to Western styles and Western philosophies, which endure to colonize native, conventional Indian rituals. If Maya has come from the poverty-stricken castes, she could be shunned and possibly slaughtered for revealing the attitudes. As Laiq views it, the superior socio-economic classes are provided with a character that is both clear and obscure, which immunizes them from the regular structures of the law, and he is not a little jealous of their privilege.

Cultural, class, gender and racial boundaries are also involved with the institution of marriage, which apparently controls dream by insisting conventional patriarchal customs and roles. Marriage becomes another method of imperialism in which there can be a failure of female individuality; it is a colonizing structure often offers a point of respectability, specifically for women, but with this there are also hindrances. After Lev is returned to Russia, Morgan and Maya determine to live together, but this is ephemeral and their affair ends with the murder of Morgan in Russia. When Maya writes to Lev, she says him about her and Masha, Morgan’s daughter, and of her life without him.

Sealy is establishing marriage within another kind of imperialist framework that further confronts conventional beliefs of autocratic centres. It could seem that imperialist discourses are inevitable since they infuse in every aspect of the lives. Accordingly they mutate across number of borders in means that often seem normal or natural instead of the cultural structures that they are patterned to expend a power that fuels back on itself in order to preserve the current situation. As crossing global boundaries and cruising across class, race, culture and gender upsurge, there is the concomitant effort to guard national boundary against external threats. One of the developing overtones of such provincial reinforcement is that illusions of postcolonial integrity become more and more commandeered by a nationalist imperialism that overlooks its own repressive structures.

The majority of postcolonial revolutions displayed similar hopes: eradication of poverty, social justice, liberation from imperialist repression. Yet, it is debatable that in many situations the new nation affirms cloned a similar unification of power, a new type of imperial force, but one in which domination is dictated from both internal and external. In India, Delhi is the power centre of political force, but the efforts of globalization are global and make a presence that cannot be ignored. The intertextual parallel of *The Brainfever Bird* helps to examine the elemental postcolonial vows that equality and freedom will ensue from the devastation of Western imperial power systems. Yet, the narrative of freedom has declined because it has only aided to reverse binaries instead of question the rooted representations of power apparent in guarding the boundaries of different structures of sign such as gender, class, race, and colonial repression. The exploration of these terms in a postcolonial structure show they cannot be fixed into a particular locale for they cross frontiers and fuse with other terms, which make an uncertainty, a multiplicity, in how they are carried out at the material level.

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