

## **Colonialism and Postcolonialism in Tom Stoppard's Indian Ink: An Analytical Approach**

---

**Harshita**

M.A. (ENGLISH) UGC NET

---

**Article Received:** 11/01/2024

**Article Accepted:** 08/02/2024

**Published Online:** 11/02/2024

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.2.27

---

### **Abstract:**

This paper tries to explain the psychological impacts of colonialism and post colonialism on Indians and British people. It also gives an insight into Anglo-Indian connections and how these people developed their links via art while belonging to different religions, cultures, and countries. In this play, art has served as a medium for the people of divided lines to communicate and comprehend each other. The relationship between a colonizer and the colonized is deeply explored in this play. By alternating between past and present events, Tom Stoppard has weaved a compelling tale of two countries.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Nationalism, Anglo-Indian.

*Indian Ink* is a 1995 published play written by Tom Stoppard. This play was based on his 1991 radio play *In The Native Land*. The play is set in two different periods, 1930 and 1980. It represents both England and India during their colonial and postcolonial periods. Flora Crewe, a British poetess, reaches Jummapur, India, and her arrival marks the beginning of the play. She arrived in India because of her health issues in the year 1930. In India, this is the year of Gandhi's salt march. Here, she meets Nirad Das, an Indian painter fond of England as a nation and the English language. Throughout the play, art has served as a communication medium for both. Flora met people from various social and political backgrounds, like David Durance, a British official in India, and Coomarswami, president of the Theosophical Society in Jummapur. All these people have one typical relationship: between the colonizer and the colonized. Through Flora, the relationship between these people can be easily explored.

Flora observed that she had received special treatment when she arrived in India. People greeted her on the train platform like she was a leader or a person

---

holding a superior position. They followed her around on bicycles and foot when she went sightseeing. It looked like a carnival. She felt surprised by receiving this kind of treatment from Indian people. She realized how these people were utterly enslaved when she interacted with them. Like all the people of colonized countries, Indians also felt inferior to their colonizers. To become like them, they also followed their colonizers' footsteps. They learned and spoke the English language and adjusted to the British ways in their everyday life.

Nirad Das, in this play, perfectly depicts a colonized Indian. After attending a school in the vernacular language, he proceeded to Elphinstone College in Bombay to acquire an English education. He liked to read the works of the English authors like Robert Browning, Tennyson, Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome, Charles Dickens, and Shakespeare. Agatha Christie is his favorite novelist. He likes the English language and its literature to a great extent. He is fighting for the Independence of India and wants to drive out the British from India. He understands that, like all prior empires, the British empire would eventually fall apart, yet he still admires everything about them. Flora is surprised by his behavior. She tells him one day:

**FLORA: 'Yes. You are an Indian artist, aren't you? Stick up for yourself. Why do you like everything in English?**

**DAS: I do not like everything English.' (405)**

Das immediately disagrees with her, although he enjoys all things English. Even though he has never visited London, he has memorized its whole map. He even has a list of his favorite places in London.

**DAS: 'Chelsea—of course! My favorite part of London!**

**FLORA Oh! You ...?**

**DAS: I hope to visit London one of these days. The Chelsea of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood!—Rossetti lived in Cheen Walk! Holman Hunt lived in Old Church Street! 'The Hireling Shepherd' was painted in Old Church Street! What an inspiration it would be to me to visit Chelsea!'(357)**

When Flora tells Das that she lives in Chelsea, he exclaims that it is his favorite part of London. As an artist, he sought inspiration mainly from the pre-raphaelite brotherhood and artists like Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt. Once, he told Flora the reason for liking them, which was:

**DAS: 'I like the Pre-Raphaelites because they tell stories. That is my tradition, too.... Our art is narrative, stories from the legends. The English painters had the Bible, Shakespeare, and King Arthur. We had the Bhagavata Purana and**

---

**the Rasikapriya, which was written exactly when Shakespeare had his first play, and long before Chaucer, we had the Chaurapanchasika, from Kashmir, which are poems of love written by the poet of the court on his way to his execution for falling in love with the king's daughter, and the king liked the poems so very much he pardoned the poet and allowed the lovers to marry.'**  
**(407)**

As an Indian who has grown up under British rule, Das has the perspective that Britishers are superior to all of them. This is the only reason that even though he belongs to a country with rich art, culture, literature, and history, he still seeks inspiration from English artists. Though he acknowledges the art and literature of his country, he admires the art and literature of England. He even thanks Lord Macaulay for introducing English in the Indian schools. He even hopes that one day he can write like Lord Macaulay, just like how he can paint using the techniques of the Pre-Raphaelites. All of his words point to the fact that he is wholly colonized despite fighting for his country's freedom. Ironically, even most of the nationalists communicate in English despite having so many languages. This demonstrates the degree of colonization experienced by all Indians. They do not even have a language of their own in which they can communicate with their fellow Indians. They speak in the language of their conquerors. This shows that they are not only physically but also mentally ruled by the Britishers.

The play keeps switching between the past and current scenarios. As Stoppard has put it, — 'It is not intended that the stage be demarcated between India and England, or past and present.'(366) Therefore, it is as if the past and the present, both in England and India, are in dialogue to represent the social stratification in time and space. Stoppard illustrates the transition from the past to the present and the differences between whites and locals on the same stage to highlight the likeness of English hegemony. In the current scenario, Mrs. Swan, Flora's sister, and Anish Das, Nirad Das's son, get into a conversation. Eldon Pike, a research scholar of the late poetess Flora Crewe, and Dilip, an Indian man, are also present in this period. It is the postcolonial era of the year 1980.

The postcolonial period is 'all the cultures affected by the imperial process from colonization to the present day.' In this postcolonial period, it can be easily seen how colonization has shaped the identity, culture, economy, and behavior of the natives. While the Indians refer to the first uprising in 1857 as 'rebellion,' the British consider it as 'mutiny.' Mrs. Swan has lost her colonial identity but continues acting as a colonizer. She is not moderate like Flora. She tries to suppress Anish in their conversation. She tries to legitimize colonization after a miserable portrayal of India. She feels that it was colonization that made India a proper country.

---

Anish tries to defend his country, but coming from a colonized nation, he cannot do much. Nirad Das raised him in the same way as most of the colonized Indians raised their children. Whites' superiority has been ingrained in their thinking. Though the Indians have gained Independence mentally, they are still imprisoned by the Britishers. They still feel inferior in front of Britishers and look down upon their own country and culture while praising the English way of life.

Anish is a painter, but he does not consider himself to be an Indian artist. He knows that India is his homeland but rarely travels there since he is uninterested in the country's rituals and cultures. Though he is settled in England and married to an English girl, he still feels inferior in England and in front of the Britishers. Stoppard has provided a voice to the colonized people through Anish, in which their point of view is presented to a colonizer.

**ANISH: 'Mrs Swan, you are an evil woman. You advance a preposterous argument and try to fill my mouth with cake so I cannot answer you. I will resist you and your cake. We were the Romans! We were up to date when you were a backward nation. The foreigners who invaded you found a third-world country! Even when you discovered India in the age of Shakespeare, we already had our Shakespearians. Moreover, with our science, architecture, literature, and art, we had an older and more splendid culture; we were rich! After all, that is why you came.'** (370)

Historically, the English were enthralled by India and placed a high value on it. India's Independence was a significant loss to them. Queen Victoria once noted in her diary, before the end of the East India Company, "a universal feeling that India should belong to me." India was not the foremost colony in the British Empire, nor was it the last to be victorious in Independence. However, it can be confidently affirmed that in India, more than in any other place, British colonial customs were redefined for imperial governance in their territories worldwide. The moral values and cultural justifications that guided the British Raj in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became central to Britain's changing understanding of itself.

The loss of India as a British colony can also be felt in the conversation between Mrs. Swan and Anish. Mrs. Swan still refers to India as home. She remembers the fresh water from the Himalayas, fruit trees, and many other things. In the postcolonial age, Britishers lamented the loss of their vast empire, whereas Indians saw little change except for their Independence. The English language still infects their thoughts. White superiority has been deeply ingrained in their thinking. They continue to copy English law, education, and habits. Even though they know this, they cannot do anything about it. Dilip sums it up very clearly in his monologue:  
**DILIP: '(Cheerfully) It is a disaster for us! Fifty years of Independence, and we**

---

**are still hypnotized! Jackets and ties must be worn! English-model public schools for the children of the elite and the voice of the Bush House is heard in the land. Gandhi would fast again, I think. Only, this time, he would die. It was not for this India; your Nirad Das and his friends held up their homemade banner at the Empire Day gymkhana. It was not for this that he threw his mango at the Resident's car. What a pity, though, that all his revolutionary spirit went into his life and none into his art.' (428)**

To summarise, Stoppard has given an insight into both the colonial and postcolonial eras and the perspectives of diverse people through this play. "I make plays because composing dialogue is the only credible means of contradicting yourself," Stoppard explains in an interview. He has not dominated anyone in this play. Each participant presented his or her point of view through talks, which sometimes opposed the others. Stoppard makes Flora finish the play with a taped reading of excerpts from *Book Two of Up the Country*:

**(Recorded) 'Simla, Saturday, May 25th, 1839. The Queen's Ball "came off" yesterday with great success [ . . . ] we one hundred and five Europeans being surrounded by at least three thousand Indians, who looked on at what we call our polite amusement, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. I sometimes wonder if they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it.' (456) .**

These lines perfectly sum up Anglo-Indian paradoxes and the varying perceptions of them. Stoppard has beautifully penned both the colonial and postcolonial eras. He gave voice to the colonized Indians and established a communication medium between the colonizer and the colonized. The insight into the lives of colonized Indians demonstrates how colonization severely impacts the people. The colonized people lose their real identities completely. They try to become like their colonizers. They attempt to instill a British way of life in India. They try to imitate their language, art, and culture. They remain mentally entangled in the past and act in British ways even after gaining their Independence from them. It is also impossible for the people of England to let go of their past. They miss their time as rulers and continue to behave like colonists whenever the opportunity arrives.

### **References:**

- Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. (1989) *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*.
- Balkaya, Mehmet A. (2015). A Dialogic Reading of Tom Stoppard's Postcolonial Discourse in *Indian Ink*. *European Academic Research*, Vol. III, Issue 5/ August 2015.

- Mukherjee, T. (2017). Sites of Desire: Chandrapore-Mayapore-Jummapur: Race, Sexuality, and Law in Colonial India. *Advances in Literary Study*, 5, 123-142.
- Russell, Richard B.(2004). "It will make us friends: Cultural Reconciliation in Tom Stoppard's Indian Ink," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 27.3(Winter 2004).
- Stoppard, Tom.(1999). *Plays 5: Arcadia, The Real Thing, Night & Day, Indian Ink*, Hapgood. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.