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The Hungry Tide and One Hundred Years of Solitude: Little Narrative vs the Grand Narrative

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Through an in-depth reading of two texts—one from the postcolonial, and the other from the neocolonial times — I would like to present the dichotomy and tussle that pervades the self, the local, the nation-state and the global in postcolonial and neocolonial nations. The texts chosen for the purpose are *The Hungry Tide (HT)* by Amitav Ghosh and *One Hundred Years of Solitude (OHYS)* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. These two novels construct a history of the effect of colonial / postcolonial governance on the locals / subalterns of Indian subcontinent and of multinational corporations on the indigenous / Marginals of Latin America, respectively.

In an attempt to explore the barriers that traverse between the local, the nation-state and the global, I delve at the issues in its totality as well as focus on its localized settings. My ambition finds support in Lyotardian view, which emphasizes on having a ‘subliminal’ or transcendental way of delving into layers of coercion embedded in the local, the national and the global narrative. I would not make an attempt to override the current perceptions and existing theoretical traditions, and then, empirically resolve the dilemmas with a new paradigm, but to reflect upon and expose the complexities that dwell the overlapping layers of human discourse and development and bring forth to debate some bottom-up postmodernist resolutions.

In this paper, I would first discuss briefly the plot of the two novels and then move on to the theoretical postulation of postmodernism that bears upon the facts / realities presented in the text. And I then will go on to problematize the issues as they emerge from an analytic investigation of the empirical world of the subalterns / locals and flora and fauna and tigers of Sunderban (West Bengal/India/Asia) as well as the material and spiritual world of Macondo (Columbia / Latin America). The emphasis would be to illustrate the generic pattern of colonial and neocolonial suppression and oppression of the locals in Indian Subcontinent and Asia as well as Latin America.

Amitav Ghosh has problematized the predicament of the subalterns living in the archipelago of Sundarbans, who had to conform to several layers of authorities and legitimacies imposed upon them. At one level, they confront the State that is the Left Regime of West Bengal and at another level Nation State because the erstwhile Left Regime of West Bengal had already negotiated the Nation-State at power at the Central / Federal level in India. And over and above, there is another layer—the typical, modernist and global Western conception of preservation of ecology and conservation of flora and

fauna. So the Marginals of Sundarban have layer after layer of impositions that they have to negotiate with in order to survive.

Ghosh has adopted double-helix narrative strand in this novel: he has interpreted the event of the late 1970s postcolonial India, simulated the reality and woven it into a narrative to present the experience of the Marginals who had been displaced three times: from Bangladesh to Sundarban, and then from Sundarban to the Rehabilitation Camps in Central India and from there to Sunderban. They are silenced and suppressed from time to time by the diktat of the State (Provincial and Central/Federal Government). This incident dramatizes the conflict between the two perspectives – the perspective of the ensuing politics of ecology on one end and the life of the Marginals of Sunderban on the other.

In *OHYS* Marquez tells the tale of Latin history by chronicling imaginary but a family emblematic of many realistic imageries of the Latin America—the Beunidas of Macondo—and in doing so constructs the history of effect of multinational ventures on the life of the local inhabitants. Macondo and the family of Beunidas represent the initial settlement of Spanish colonizers in Latin America...“What the composition of Macondo as a chronicle (*cronica*) presupposes, instead is a global view of overlapping culture and time period. This makes it possible for Garcia Marquez to articulate Latin American history in a form that goes beyond the *grand rectis* of Enlightenment, the phenomenology of self and the philosophy of history” (Rincon 179).

The major historical events of *OHYS*, after the violence of the founding years, are the revolutionary wars and the banana strike massacre. Both incidents are an outcome of violence generated by elite authoritarian control and based on major occurrences in Columbia’s history. Neocolonial ventures like United Fruit Company and other North American commercial groups that monopolized sectors of economy in Latin America, ushered in rapid changes and the whole region was propelled into the global economy. The neocolonial imperial mission used the Nation-State as a lever to generate Capital and the dream of a democratic state was thus subverted with the ‘profit’ and ‘greed’ taking over. The year 1928 witnessed the strike by the employees of United Fruit Company in the Columbian Banana Zone. The arrival of army brought in violence and the town was in a state of siege leading to the shattering of the dream of a utopian settlement. Contact with the outside world gradually transforms the innocent and solitary state of Macondo into a violent place with two Civil Wars and deaths. As the city is submerged by years of violence, the Buenida family wanes and time takes a circular motion as last of the Buenidas remains solitary.

Theoretical Postulations:

The Grand Narrative that spans our analysis is that of the Nation-State (in case of *HT* it is India and for *OHYS*, Columbia in Latin America) and the Global (in *HT* it is the Western Climatologist regime and in *OHYS*, Multinational Corporations as harbingers and perpetrators of American neocolonialism or imperialism). Both the narratives are offshoots of the meta-narrative of rationality and reasoning of modernism. In the modernist perceptions and prescriptions, the voices of the local would find ‘unease synthesis’ with that of the nation-state in the Hegelian sense of the termⁱ. Unfortunately, modernism rather becomes a ‘legitimation crisis’ of the expectation and evolution. It neither evolved the way it had been perceived and imagined in the West. Nor was the non-Western way replicated the Western way.

Theda Skocpol claims in her ‘Return of State’ arguments illustrated in her magnum opus *States and Social Revolution* and I paraphrase it here: Some research claim fresh theoretical assumption, paradigm or theory. And many others throw new light on old paradigm or theory. I adhere to the later approach. In certain ways, I assume our approach falls in this Skocpolian genre of throwing new light on the extant tradition of post-modernism by reemphasizing on the need to celebrate and invigorate ‘local’ over Nation-State-and-Global pact.

HT and *OHYS* present the tussle between two Wittgensteinian ‘language games’: the language game of the Grand Narrative and that of the Little Narrative. I have dug into the differences underlying the perception into consideration and have tried to provide pointers towards the dichotomy that emerges from it. ‘The Unfinished Project of Modernity’ of Habermas will forever remain unfinished, I assert, and the legitimation crisis will continue to linger both in the Western and the non-western world unless I accord primacy and /or equal dignity to the Little Narrative vis-à-vis the Grand Narrative as Lyotard has claimed. According to Lyotard it is the pulses and perceptions of the Little Narrative which often provides better solutions and resolutions to the problems in striking a balance between needs of ecology and displaced human beings in case of *HT* and the variations in the secularized mindsets of local liberals and conservatives and the outer intervention by imperial colonies in case of One Hundred Years of Solitude.

These theoretical departures will become more nuanced and pronounced as I move into an empirical investigation of the world of Sunderban and Macondo. However, I want to emphasize in this section that Lyotardⁱⁱ deftly captures Ludwig Wittgenstein’s language gamesⁱⁱⁱ. Wittgenstein becomes vivid for Lyotard when he argues that the spirit of the narratives is important, not a grand purpose for finding truth or falsity in order to conduct better research and figuring out solutions for deprived Marginals. It is the spirit of the situation and context that is more important to understand complex human

situations (like that of the indigenous natives / Marginals) than simply one language game clashing with the other. It is more how the language game of one narrative comes to coexist with the language game of other narrative. In our case here, the Grand and Little Narrative have both their sways if given full expression and equal representation. The point is: Could I emphasize more harmony and coexistence instead of conflict and subversion of local by the national and global!

Empirical evaluation:

Using *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as one such podium, I go a step further to refine my ideas which is deeply perched and embedded onto Lyotardian concept of postmodernism. I analyse how such ideas as they emanate from post-modernism have been played upon the turf of indigenous societies in a neocolonial nation. Here, several overlapping dimensions that emerges:

1. The initial settlers fled from their homeland haunted by the specter of violence to set up a New World, which proved illusory by the subsequent course of history.
2. Neocolonial venture of American government co-opted the State administration and its elite.
3. The local elites alienate the locals/Marginals, as their interests converge with the State Administration and its elite.
4. The aspirations and desire of the local Ire silenced by the convergence of interests of the elites at local, national and global level.

The *Hungry Tide* gives us a plot to experiment our theoretical postulations on postmodernism in postcolonial India. And here, I also come across several overlapping layers:

1. The colonial master's ambitions to implement the Grand Narrative of Enlightenment (e.g., 'white-man's burden') in order to make the newly independent territories of Asia, Africa and Latin America become like them.
2. The postcolonial elite inherit the pedigree of the westernized elite and get co-opted.
3. At the bottom is the subaltern level, the Marginals who have come to coexist, partially assimilating or sometimes, not assimilating at all into the State elites perceptions and strategies.

4. And finally, the locals that survived the impositions and threats of the State, the Nation and the Global.

When I visualize the microcosm of Sundarban and its characters: through Piya, I get a western perspective and the western narrative of relation between human and nature; through Kanai, the perception of the realities of a middle-class bourgeois; and the subaltern / local perception through Fokir.

So both Ghosh and Marquez, in the act of sketching the history of postcolonial India and neocolonial Latin America respectively, bring forth the representations that are beyond the reach of the Grand Narrative. In *HT* the myth of *Bon Bibi* of Sundarbans and in *OHYS* the myth of Macondo and the matriarch Ursula Beunida serve as the Little Narratives that hold the community together. These Little Narratives do not fluidly fit into the Grand Narrative of the West and the Nation-State.

Marquez's book presents the global vision of overlapping culture and has articulated Latin American history that goes beyond the Grand Narrative of the Enlightenment. And simultaneously criticizes the Liberals as well as the Conservatives: the endless Civil Wars between them, represented by Aurelino's insurrections that lead to the slowdown and complications in progress. The dynasty of the Beunidas, which had to bear the pained history is elitist. Here, the colonial elites clash with the neocolonial elites and so do their ethos and expectations resulting in the deterioration and end of all form of elite ascendancy or status. As the novel reveals the Liberals are hegemonic in nature, however, Conservatives embody the worst features of oligarchic repressions, which they justify under the banner of God-given power to establish 'public order and family morality.' So Marquez has interpreted the historical facts, simulated the reality and has presented their language games that stand in contrast to the one-size-fits-all paradigm of neo-colonial masters or global elites.

Lyotard's *Just Gaming* is of imminent relevance to the understanding of incidents like Morichjhappi and Macondo. He proposes a system of ethics based on negotiation of other's right to employ their own language games to present their points of view. Injustice occurs when the language game of the Marginals is silenced by the language game of a dominant group. Unless I understand the terms of the local, I will not be able to grasp the realities and comprehensive dimensions. And I trample the possibility of harmonious co-existence of Global and Local, subverting local needs or making them subservient to the diktat of the Global. As long as the thesis of the Grand Narrative of the West remain antithetical to the Little Narrative of the locals, the product will be an 'unease synthesis' in Hegelian sense, and in that, Morichjhapis or Macondos will continue to remain the tragedies and repeats of history .

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ⁱ Hegel argues that mankind's knowledge is a constant flux towards progress – towards an achievement of the state of the Absolute where our ideas about 'material reality' merge and become one with what all philosopher call 'Unity.' Until this 'Absolute' I are confined to the condition of knowledge in a 3-step progression of dialectical reasoning: Thesis, Anti-thesis and Synthesis.

ⁱⁱ Lyotard writes that all knowledge, even that associated with positive science, is mediated by "language games."

ⁱⁱⁱ Wittgenstein draws an analogy between language and rule-governed game (chess, football). He claims to understand a game one need not be privy to the mental activity of the players/speakers, but simply understand the game, that is, the language of the interlocutors.