

Individuated Indian: A Study on Indian Selfhood based on Three Fictional  
Narratives, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Aravind Adiga's *The White  
Tiger* and the Film, *Slumdog Millionaire*

Summary

This study intended to see how far the ideal of the collectivity over the individual, or vice versa is embedded in the Indian psyche through a general, though not limiting, framework of three internationally acclaimed fictional narratives on contemporary India, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* (2008) and the Danny Boyle directed film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008).

Approaching the topic through a multi-disciplinary perspective, the research analyzed the characters of these works as well as some other popular fictional narratives, (in the form of poems and contemporary folk tales). A contemporary historical understanding of the Democratic India and its citizens is brought about by comparing the Independence Day speeches of the first prime minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru and the present Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the light of Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Further, the research has analyzed the fictional narratives within its purview drawing from theories by political thinkers like Chantal Mouffe, philosophers like George Simondon and

Bernard Stiegler, sociologist David Riesman, psychologists Beatrice Kerl and Thelma Duffey.

The individuation of a self does not mean to be a process which completely cuts off a self from others. It is just a cutting off of a community around a self, so that the self can shake off a lot of undesirable elements which constitute that community. It is a radical shift in the self's temporal trajectory of relationships, or, a "short circuit," in Stiegler's term. At the same time, not all old relations are cut off, though the continuation of these remnant old relations exists in entirely different planes. That could be the reason why, in the end of the fictional narratives studied here we find renewals and reconnections. In *Slumdog Millionaire* Salim is reunited with his childhood sweet heart, Latika, in *The White Tiger* Balram has his nephew with him, and the cook has his son back in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

But, there are sharp breaks and loss of even pined for relationships. Salim lost his brother, Balram his family, including his loved brother, and Sai lost her Gyan. But they are seen as inevitable losses, losses without which the individuation of the protagonist's self might not take place. Moreover, as Simonden proposed, individuation is not a principle, but, a process. "Individuation ... is not a mere isolated consequence arising as a by-product of becoming, but this very process itself as it unfolds (301). The individual self which could be seen as having emerged at the end of each narrative is not a product, but part of a process of the

individuation of the individual, and, consequently, part of a process of the individuation of the communal entity, and that of the nation, India.

Thus, individual- community polarity in contemporary India is hardly explicable within rational frameworks, but is embedded in everyday activities, inter relational contingencies, material requisites, and, desires, dreams, fears, hypocrisies, and a multiple of such delicate emotional frequencies. As de Certeau states in *The Practice of Everyday Life* “analysis shows that a relation . . . determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (xi). And so, the so-called separate entity of the “individuated Indian,” the search for whom had caused this research has refused materialization even at the end of this study. Instead what this study offers is a myriad of relations through which individuals in the India of the first decade of the twenty first century escaped thrust-on identities to incorporate pluralities of “relational determinations”.

Doing this, the selves studied here have, as we saw in these narratives, continually striven to individuate themselves, at the same time going through phases which only further incorporated them into more varied communal identifications.

Works Cited:

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