

## A Dialogic Reading of Tom Stoppard's Postcolonial Discourse in *Indian Ink*<sup>1</sup>

MEHMET AKIF BALKAYA

Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature  
Faculty of Science and Letters, Aksaray University  
Aksaray, Turkey

### Abstract:

*The aim of this study is to examine to what extent the struggle and interaction between the colonizer and the colonized contribute to response to British colonial domination, othering and oppression in Tom Stoppard's *Indian Ink* (1994). This will be carried out by means of a Bakhtinian polyphonic and dialogic analysis that aims to ascertain the relationship between the colonial and postcolonial time and setting. It will be concluded that the colonial and postcolonial India and Indians are under the west hegemony although the postcolonial Indians are more educated. But since the education system is established by the colonizer, subjection is felt at every step of life for an Indian. Through a dialogic reading, it will be deduced that the struggle and interaction of the characters through dialogues bring to light the cultural representation and diversity and establish a response to colonial discourse both in the past and present. As Stoppard reveals, the colonized replies to the prejudices and stereotyping of the colonizer. The voices of the colonized Indians are heard since the play has a postcolonial and polyphonic structure; that is, the voiceless inferior Indian is voiced by the playwright.*

**Key words:** Dialogism, Polyphony, Postcolonial literature, Stoppardian drama, Post/Colonial Discourse

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*Indian Ink*, an adaptation of a radio play *In The Native Land* (1991), was published in 1995. Tom Stoppard (1937 - ) portrays both 1930s and 1980s England and India to suggest that the conscious of both the colonizer and the colonized has not changed so far because of the effects of the colonialism. Stoppard tells the reader/actor to imagine/use the same scene and décor for both time and setting because it is implied that the British rule and colonization in India and its socio-political and economic interactions, power and impact are still dominant and apparent in the subjugated India/n. Colonial discourse is based on the hierarchical difference between the western and the eastern. The West performs military and political power to dominate and prevail the East. In addition to this, the east/ern is exposed to cultural influences of the west/ern. The cultural heritage of the colonizer and the colonized is portrayed through Flora and Nirad's dialogues in 1930s and Anish Das (Nirad's son) and Mrs. Swan's (Flora's sister) dialogues in 1980s. That is, while Flora and Nirad experience the colonial period, Mrs. Swan and Anish discuss the issue of colonialism. Therefore, socio-cultural heritage of colonialism is represented through the characters in dialogue and interaction, which is succeeded through the portrayal of both the colonial (1930s) and the postcolonial times (1980s).

The British poet Flora Crewe, visiting India because of her health problem, meets Nirad Das, an Indian painter who undertakes a nude portrait of Flora. The other characters are David Durance, a British official in India, Eldon Pike, an American academic studying on Flora Crewe, Mrs Swan, Flora's sister and Anish Das, Nirad's son. Hence, the play includes various people from different social backgrounds; that is, *Indian Ink* has many voices to present heteroglossia, representing different social groups in India, ideologies of both the colonizer and the colonized through the perspectives of both in 1930s and 80s, and worldviews in the colonial/postcolonial India/England.

## Colonial/Postcolonial Discourse

The past is the colonial setting, in which the Indians experienced the hegemony of the British. Anian Loomba defines the term colonialism as below:

... a settlement in a new country[,] . . . a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a new community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parent state is kept up. (1)

The east and the non-west are overwhelmed by the power of the West through its military, trading company and culture mostly for economic reasons; therefore, the colonial discourse applies hegemony and hierarchy over the powerless, which is made the "other" by the colonial literature. The English exploit the Indians to such an extreme extent that Flora's sister deplores not keeping the Indian envelopes. While reading the letters, Mrs. Swan regrets by saying "I wish I'd kept the envelopes, they'd be worth something now, surely, the Indian ones at least" (370).

At the very beginning of the play, the young English poet Flora Crewe is met as if she was a leader. While arriving Jummapur to meet the Theosophical Society to give a lecture in 1930s, she writes letter to her sister Mrs. Swan, who talks to Mr. Pike, a Professor writing a book on Flora Crewe's letters in 1980s. As Stoppard has put it, "It is not intended that the stage be demarcated between Indian 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 both time and spaces. The transitions between the past and present and the whites and the natives are represented on the same stage by Stoppard to reveal the resemblance of English hegemony.

The language used by the colonizer and the colonized differs from each other since each has different culture and ideology. This diversity takes place as the English and the Indians are in an interactive relation both in 1930s and 1980s. As Mikhail Bakhtin has put it, between groups of language, and different discourses such as “social dialects ... professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups ... languages of the authorities, of passing fashions...” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 263) there exists a conflict, which stratifies language. Flora Nirad's dialogues are different than Mrs. Swan and Anish's dialogues since they are the representations of different age groups. The dialogue below illustrates the cultural interaction between Flora and Nirad:

FLORA: ... It's your country, and we've got it. Everything else is bosh...

DAS: ... The English painters had the Bible and Shakespeare, King Arthur ... We had the Bhagavata Purana, and the Rasikpriya which was written exactly when Shakespeare had his first play. And long before Chaucer we had the Chaurapanchasika, from Kashmir, which is poems of love... (429).

The Indians have their own writers during the early periods of colonization and it is known that there are eastern characters in Shakespeare's plays; therefore, cultural, social and literary interactions have existed since the very beginning of colonialism. However, when Anish and Mrs. Swan discuss on such colonial issues, Mrs. Swan is not portrayed to be as moderate as her sister was. What she says to Anish is totally Eurocentric: “We made you a proper country! And when we left you fell straight to pieces like Humpty Dumpty' Look at the map' you should feel nothing but shame!” (Stoppard 390).

Flora struggles to indicate that the Indians have their own cultures and literature whenever Nirad speaks well of English literature. In that sense, what Zekiye Antakyaloğlu says is true: “... the colonized 'other', Nirad Das, whose art is

overwhelmed by English models, learns to value his native heritage ..." (Antakyalioğlu 21). Nirad and Flora talk over the reason why Flora cannot write any poem that day, Flora explains why: "The ... emotion won't harmonize", it is not the "rhyming" or "the meter" (406). Das says: "It is better to wait. My painting has nor *rasa* today", and explains what *rasa* is: "*Rasa* is juice. Its taste. Its essence. A painting must have its *rasa* which is not the painting exactly ... it is the emotion which the artist must arouse in you" (406 -7). Flora realizes and justifies that Indian term and says "Rasa... yes. My poem has no *rasa*" (407). Das adds that "The *rasa* of erotic love is called Shringar. Its god is Vishnu, and its colour is shyama, which is blue-black" (407). As Flora realizes that Nirad knows about his literature, she regrets and resents that Nirad favors English writers. She says "[you] reminded me of Dr Aziz in Forster's novel ... I kept wanting to kick him ... for not knowing his worth" (408).

### **Hegemony and the Voice**

The hegemony of the British is realized throughout the play. Flora Crewe tells her reception at the train station by the Indians and says "I thought there must be somebody important on the train - ... - and it turned out to be me" (Stoppard 367). The reason she is welcomed as if she was a leader is that she is an English woman or the "memsahib" as the Indians call. The language and the social structure of both the Indians and the English are put forth to enable heteroglossia. Although various cultures are in interaction, Stoppard does not put any character forward. Regarding the interaction of the characters, Bakhtin says "[t]he character's speech of himself and of the world is as weighty as the traditional authorial discourse; it is not subordinated to the objective character of the hero, as one of his characteristics; at the same time it does not serve as an expression of the authorial voice" (*Problems* 13). That is, each

character has his/her own conscious; the playwright does not dominate over the characters; therefore, polyphony is established. In a polyphonic work the voices of conscious characters “are not merged in the unity of the event” (Bakhtin *Dostoevsky* 6) as is the case in *Indian Ink*, in which each character talks without getting under pressure of another character’s conscious both in the colonial 1930s and 1980s. Neither Flora nor Nirad restricts the other’s speech.

The voices of the colonized Indians are heard since the play has a postcolonial and polyphonic structure; that is, the voiceless inferior Indian is voiced by the playwright. The situation of the colonized was discussed by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism*, in which he says:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

The injustices of the oppressor and power-holder colonizer prevail over the voiceless groups who become outcast in their own land both during and after colonization. The dialogues between the English poet Flora and the Indian painter Nirad reveal the power struggles established by the white (wo)man. The gap between the Indian and the British culture is the focal point of the dialogue below:

FLORA: ... You are and Indian artist ... ? Why do you like everything English? ... Chelsea, Bloomsbury, Oliver Twist, Goldflake cigarettes, Winsor and Newton ... even painting in oils, that’s not Indian. You’re trying to paint me from my point of view instead of yours – what you think is my point of view. You deserve the bloody Empire!

...

DAS: The bloody Empire finished off Indian painting ... The cotton is Indian but we cannot compete in the weaving. (426 - 27).

Flora feels out of place since Das feels superiority of the English in areas such as architecture, literature, and language. As realized, the colonizer establishes sovereignty over the marginalized group not only by its army and trading companies but also by the use of language and literature. In this case, Stoppard seems to be against such representation to justify the colonized and to reconcile the two sides. Therefore, the silenced colonized is given voice by the postcolonial writer. Another example to such a dialogue in which the colonized defends him is as such:

ANISH: Mrs Swan, you are a very wicked 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... Even when you discovered Indian in the age of Shakespeare, we already had our Shakespeares. And our science – achitecture – our literature and art, we had a culture older and more splendid, we were rich' After all, that's why you came.

Anish expostulates and replies to defend his culture; however, since his country has been colonized for centuries, it is not that easy to overcome the problems of colonization after decolonization. In that sense, what Lois Tyson says is true: “[t]hat so many peoples formerly colonized by Britain speak English, write in English, use English in their schools and universities, and conduct government business in English ... is an indication of the residual effect of colonial domination on their cultures” (Tyson 419).

Mrs Swan aims to legitimate colonization through a miserable portrayal of India:

MRS SWAN: (angrily) We made you a proper country! And when we left you fell straight to pieces like Humpty Dumpty'

Look at the map' you should feel nothing but shame! ... Will you be going home?

ANISH: Oh – home! I didn't mean I was a guest in England. England is my home now. I have spent half my life here. I married here [an English girl]. (390-91)

The colonizer, in this case Mrs Swan, "... sees [the colonized] as a mirror that reflects the colonialist's self-image" (Bhabha 65). That is, the colonizer portrays the native according as the colonized was thought to be. However, as portrayed in the *Indian Ink*, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is portrayed in an interwoven and complicated way; that is, the narration is not portrayed from the angle of the colonizer; the "othered" native has the right to speak. Therefore, interaction takes place and leads to polyphony through the establishment of dialogism in the postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial literature is the "study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialism, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects" (Ashcroft *et al.* 187). Therefore, the native speaks for him/herself in postcolonial works. "In India's case, this includes novels, poetry, and drama which were written both during and after the British Raj or "Reign," which came to a formal conclusion with Indian Independence in August 1947" (Harrison, "What is Postcolonial Literature?").

In the colonial discourse, stereotyping works to the detriment of the non-west and non-white. In this case, Walter Lippmann says:

We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions ... govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange as sharply alien. (90)



The colonial discourse makes us perceive the local people of the colonized countries illogical, lazy, and uneducated, so they are made inferior to the colonizer. For instance, because of the power cut, Das finds a boy for Flora to fan and cool her room, and says "I've told him the memsahib is sick" (425). The native uses a native boy as a servant for the white woman in their homeland. Similar to that position, Flora portrays the Indians as such: "... while the committee bicycled alongside, sometimes two to a bike, and children ran before and behind – I felt like a carnival float representing Empire – or, depending how you look at it, the Subjugation of the Indian People, and of course you're right, darling, but I never saw anyone less subjugated than Mr. Coomoraswami" (372). The restrained Indians seem to be unaware of their subjugation, and the colonial power is dominant over them.

Since the Indian and the English are in dialogue both in the colonization and decolonization periods, heteroglossia is established because we listen both periods from the perspectives of both the colonized and the colonizer. Therefore, "Postcolonial literature attempts to ... restor[e] a connection between indigenous people and places through description, narration, and dramatization" (Harrison, "What is Postcolonial Literature?"). As time progresses, Flora and Nirad's friendship advances. The Indian painter Nirad keeps asking questions and commenting on English writers as such "I was surprised you did not mention Virginia Woolf... Have you met George Bernard Shaw?" (375). Then, they talk about England. Das seems to be curious and well-informed about England and English writers. When he learns that Flora lives in Chelsea, Das says: "Chelsea – of course! My favorite part of London! ... I hope to visit London one of these days. ... What an inspiration it would be to me to visit Chelsea!" (376). However, Flora cannot put up with Das' subjugated personality since he sublimes England and its literature, and she says "... I want you to be with me as if you would be if *I* were Indian" (383) but

Das gives an unexpected reply “An Indian Miss Crewe! Oh dear, that is a mental construction which has no counterpart in the material world” (383). As Nirad Das has put it, the oppression and exploitation of the non-white shape and reshape the minds of the Indians. Throughout the colonial period, the colonial discourse has governed but postcolonial works have enabled the dominated groups to express themselves. Regarding this feature of postcolonial literature, Harrison states that “Revising history to tell things from the perspective of those colonized is thus a major preoccupation of postcolonial writing (Harrison, “What is Postcolonial Literature?”).

However, some Indians, especially the elite ones, internalize the power structure of colonization for personal interests. For instance, Rajah, the Indian local leader, supports the British and acts as if he was a British. What he says about the mutiny demonstrates his attitude against his own land and people: “... My grandfather stood firm with the British during the First Uprising ... In 1857 the danger was from fundamentalists” (456). The key historical and political event discussed by the characters in the play is the Indian Rebellion of 1857. It was a civil revolt against the British domination. While the English characters such as Mrs. Swan and David Durance refer to this rebellion as a ‘mutiny’, the Indians call it a ‘war’. The independent supporters are named as “fundamentalists” by Rajah. Homia Bhabha explains such a position as: “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes and opinions, in morals and intellect”—in other words a mimic man” (87). The painter Nirad Das seems to be such a man, as well. Whenever he talks about English literature or England, he praises them:

DAS: I like Dickens and Browning, and Shakespeare, of course – but my favourite is Agatha Christie! ... I have to thank Lord Macaulay for English, you know. It was his idea when he was in the government of India that English should be taught to us all. He wanted to supply the East India

Company with clerk ... [instead] he produced lawyers, journalists, civil servants, he produced Gandhi! (393)

The British politician Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800 - 1859) brought a British education system to India so that the Indians would acknowledge the English superiority and resistance would be minimized. In other words, "... colonialist ideology, which is inherently Eurocentric, was a pervasive force in the British schools established in the colonies to inculcate British culture and values in the indigenous peoples and thereby forestall rebellion" (Tyson 421).

However, Nirad's son Anish is aware of the injustices and inequalities of the colonial period. Nirad's child Anish brings Flora Crewe's nude painting, portrayed by his father. Anish says "Well, I'm as Indian as he was. But yes. I suppose I am not particularly Indian painter ... not an Indian painter particularly, or rather ..." there, Mrs Swan corrects him "Not particularly an Indian painter" (385). The colonized gets English education to obey the English authority as Mrs. Swan and Anish Das discuss:

ANISH: In my earliest memory, my father was an old gentleman who spoke very little except when he sometimes read aloud to me. He liked to read in English. Robert Browning, Tennyson, Macaulay's lays of Ancient Rome, and Dickens, of course ... "because "he went from a vernacular school to Elphinstone College in Bombay, and you only have to look at Elphinstone College to see that it was built to give us a proper English education" (389).

MRS SWAN: ... Your father took part in actions against the British Raj and loved English literature, which was perfectly consistent of him.

ANISH: (laughs) Usually, the education succeeded admirably! In Jummapur we were 'loyal' as you would say, we had been loyal to the British right through the first War of Independence.

MRS SWAN: The... ? What war was that?

ANISH: The Rising of 1857.

MRS SWAN: Oh, you mean the Mutiny. (389)

Nirad raises his child through imposing the superiority of the white on Anish as many Indians do. The father and the child are educated on English schools in India. Therefore, the natives concede the inferiority mentally. The resistance to the ruling power, England, is called a mutiny by the colonizer in order to mentally diminish the strength of resistance. In other words, the colonizer does not call the rebel as a war to look down on and to demoralize the colonizer. However, the natives realize the unfair attitudes of the white especially after decolonization. The dehumanized, voiceless and exploited colonized who had an inferior treatment in the colonial discourse has the right to speak for him/herself in the postcolonial discourse as realized in Anish's replies.

### **Imbedding the Power**

The power, authority and hegemony are established by the west through industrial and military power first, then, by the cultural and social supremacy through ideologies and textual representation. That is, military and industrial power are not needed after the colonization is established, rather, the dominance is practiced in daily life through culture and language. Regarding the cultural domination, Lois Tyson remarks that,

What has been left behind is a deeply embedded cultural colonization: the inculcation of a British system of government and education, British culture, and British values that denigrate the culture, morals, and even physical appearance of formerly subjugated peoples. Thus, ex-colonials often were left with a psychological "inheritance" of a negative self-image and alienation from their own indigenous cultures... (419)

Therefore, the superiority of the west is formed by culture, language and literature to block any resistance from the colonized as the dialogue below reveals:

PIKE: Why are you so crazy about English, Dilip? ... You love it! ...

DILIP: (cheerfully) Yes, it's a disaster for us! Fifty years of Independence and we are till hypnotized! Jackets and ties must be worn! English-model public schools for the children of the elite, and the voice of Bush House is heard in the land. Gandhi would fast again, I think. Only, this time he'd die. It was not for this India, I think... (456).

Although the Indian Dilip and Anish know the truth of colonialism, they do not know what to do against it since the western ideology is embedded on their minds. The English are role-models for the Indians. Education, laws and customs are imitated by the Indians. Regarding the mental shaping of the colonized through the colonial discourse, John McLeod says: “[colonialism] operates by persuading people to internalize its logic and speak its language; to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonizers as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world” (18). In that sense, the postcolonial discourse focuses on investigating and revealing the negative and positive effects of colonialism. That Anish remains in-between is an example to that position. While discussing with Mrs Swan, Anish says: “I was in England when my father died. It was Christmas Day... I went home. It was sill ‘home’. But to my shame I found the rituals of mourning distasteful. I wanted to return to England, to my new friends ...” (447). Anish feels out of place in India, and he is alienated to his culture because of the education and the social life he internalized.

At the end of the play, Flora reads a passage from Nirad's present Emily Eden's work:

Simla, Saturday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1839 ... There was a very old Hindu temple also prettily lit up ... We dined at six, then had fireworks, and coffee, and then they all danced till twelve ...

Twenty years ago no European had ever been here, and there we were with a band playing ... all this in the face of those high hills, and we one hundred and five Europeans being surrounded by at least three thousand mountaineers, who, wrapped up in their hill blankets, looked on at what we call our polite amusements, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it. (481-82)

Simla is a city in India where the English have gone for vacation. Emily Eden cannot comprehend the reason why the Indians respected the white colonizers so much in their own lands. Eden's astonishment is similar to that of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow cannot understand why the cannibals do not eat the white men. The reason is incomprehensible both for Marlow and Eden.

## Conclusion

To conclude, throughout the play *Indian Ink* (1995) Tom Stoppard undermines colonialist ideology. When we think about the two time periods, it is revealed that the colonial and postcolonial India and Indians are under the west hegemony although the postcolonial Indians are more educated. But since the education system is established by the colonizer, subjection is felt at every step of life for an Indian. However, Flora enables Nirad to realize the importance and uniqueness of his own culture, and Anish cannot tolerate unfairness created by Mrs. Swan; therefore, the silenced colonized speaks. The dialogues between the English poet Flora Crewe and the painter Nirad Das reveal the British rule and colonization. As discussed, Flora Crewe states that she would like not to see the Indians mimic the British. Tom Stoppard does not reach at a finalized conclusion. As Stoppard says in an interview "... I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself" (qtd. in Gussow 3). Contradicting oneself

blocks monologue; therefore, his plays establish dialogues through which the characters from different ideologies and cultures emerge as is the case in *Indian Ink*. Distinct ideas exist in the colonial and postcolonial era as portrayed through the characters Flora, Nirad, Durance, and the Raj in 1930s and Mrs Swan, Anish Das, Dilip and Eldon Pike in the 1980s. The struggle and interaction of the characters through dialogues bring to light the cultural representation and diversity and establish a response to colonial discourse both in the past and present. As Stoppard reveals, the colonized replies to the prejudices and stereotyping of the colonizer. The voices of the colonized Indians are heard since the play has a postcolonial and polyphonic structure; that is, the voiceless inferior Indian is voiced by the playwright.

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