

Research Paper

Global Setting in Hari Kunzru's 'The Impressionist'

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Hari Kunzru's first novel, 'The Impressionist' has, definitely, a global plan of action commencing from Agra to Sindh, from Sindh to Bombay, from Bombay to London, from London to Paris and from Paris to Africa. The plight of the hero, right from his birth to death, has a symbolic significance leading to various stages of his life. In his life, he passed through the hardships. A British forest officer in India, swept away by the flood, is saved by a girl who was born and brought in peculiar circumstances devoid of love. In a flurry of passions, he overpowers him to express his love. When the white officer realized the situation, he was shocked to see the peculiar condition of the girl and jumped into the flooded stream.

The girl has been taken to Agra where circumstances forced her to marry a great scholar sans interest in married life. But at the birth of a boy in a noble family, their link with the Kashmiri's is given a priority because of the colour of his skin. But there is one who knows the secret of his birth. The child's mother dies, immediately, after his birth. The mother's death gives relief to her and the Astrologer. The Astrologer is shocked while preparing his horoscope. He knows from the position of the stars that the boy would not have a smooth life. But he does not reveal this to anybody. He has some casual conversation with the people present and goes out. The boy grows into a most obstinate and useless fellow, who does not hesitate to torture the members of the noble family. All the servants in the house are afraid of him. No one in the house likes him. When he is fifteen, the friend of his mother, who lived in the noble house, feels that her daughter is not safe in the house because of the boy's notorious behaviour. He informs all the inmates that he is actually the son of the White. The boy is thrown out of the house. He has to seek company of a beggar to whom he cheated and troubled in the past. Even the beggar takes his chance and before his death, he informs about the place the boy is fit for

The boy reaches the eunuch's place where he is received and prepared to lead the life of eunuchs. He is trained to serve and satisfy the rich. The time takes a severe turn and he is sold to have his place as Rukhsana in the palace of the Muslim ruler of Sindh. The incapable ruler is at the mercy of the English Major. It is the English Major who could prepare the reports to safeguard the ruler's throne and vice versa. The ruler provides him with different kinds of wild pleasures. Even the boy is sent to please the Major. The Major commits the act of adultery with the boy and for a time being the ruler's throne is safe. Soon, the boy is called to his house. The Major gives him good clothes to put on and the interesting books to read. He wants him to run away from the palace. But unfortunately, the boy does not get any opportunity for he is under the close watch. When an English officer comes to the palace to examine the question of adoption to the throne, he was taken for hunting of the man-eater. The boy who was in search of a chance to escape, availing the chaotic condition, the boy runs away and reaches Bombay.

In third stage of his life, the boy works for the missionaries in Bombay. White boy starts working on the port and the red light areas of Bombay. This romantic nature forces him to act like white though he is not. He becomes pretty popular in the misty areas of Bombay. He could earn enough through tips and gifts. But he spends the same on useless and unworthy things. In Bombay, he falls in love with an English Woman. He opens his heart to a woman. But he is abused, ridiculed and castigated. In his despair, he loses interest in life and decides to commit suicide. Author has, skillfully, presented the inner conflict in the mind of a boy through the pre independence struggle going on in Bombay. The looting, killing, murdering is the scene of Bombay where he comes across a boy who has come there from the north and is going to London on a ship. He gives vent to his heart and reveals his life history to Bobby. Though a son of his father who was a tea planter started a distillery to extract wine from tea but miserably failed in his attempt and dies living with his son in the guardianship of an Englishman in London.

Meanwhile, Bobby establishes friendly relations with the boy and takes him to a brothel. The boy consumes wine in excess. He is terribly under the alcoholic influence, loses control both of mind and body. When they get out of the brothel, a native notorious gang follows them with some malafide intention. The intoxicated boy cannot run away from the men, Bobby leaves him alone on the street and hides behind a building. When everything is calm and quiet, Bobby comes out and finds the boy dead. Bobby finds a passport and a ticket to London in boy's pocket. She also gets an address of the trustee in his pocket. Bobby, immediately, has a plan in his mind.

In the next stage of his life in London, he, easily, is accepted as Jonathan Bridgeson. For next three years he has to be in the company of the trustee. Initially, he spends his time in learning the life of London in all aspects. He wants to pose himself a real White man. Soon he is sent to a noted and popular school where utmost care is taken to mould him in an English gentle man. Bobby, as we know, is intelligent and sharp, receives compliment and acceptance from his teachers. But he fails to overcome his cowardice. He keeps himself away from games and sports where his physical strength could be tasted.

Jonathan Bridgeman seeks admission in London College. Even here he keeps himself away from hard and tough activities. By the time he develops the pronunciation skills and can speak in English accent just like a native Englishman. At this stage, he meets Star, a daughter of a renowned Anthropologist who has been working on the aborigines of Africa. He has already presented his experimental discourse before English people. He still needs to work a lot on the same. Star's father includes him to the tour of Africa. He is disinterested in going to the Africa for he wants to stay in London and express his love for Star. He has also purchased a marriage ring for her. But soon he realizes that Star has altogether different feeling and attitude towards him. When Bridgeman expresses his love for her, she refuses his proposal saying that she is not interested in one who is White. She would like to marry a person who could lead a carefree life like the natives of Africa, black in colour and who does not follow life in set patterns. Bridgeman is shocked and confused. He cannot say what he is. At this juncture, he is unable to disclose the truth.

In disappointed and dejected mood, he joins Star's father on Africa tour. Throughout his life, he could not fulfill the desire of his heart. All his aims to become real English, is the sole cause for his sufferings and hardships. Even in Africa, he does not get any opportunity to show his abilities. He is given the clerical work. He has always been kept away from physical, hard work. He has become an impressionist, who cannot enjoy life. He is totally down cast and awaits his end at the hands of aborigines. He dreams that he is taken to the cave by the natives, where he is forced to drink. Soon he visualizes that all organs of his body are desecrated and thrown. His soul moves out of his body and the natives think that with the sacrifices of the Whites, they could control the ghost of the natives. It is assumed that no one has a right to bring out a change in the lives of others. Change has to be evolutionary and not revolutionary. Nature does not accept such change.

Bobby, who was born out of the union of the black and white, is not accepted in the society. He has to play a role of eunuch because of his elimination from the noble family and the sin committed by his parents. At every stage, he becomes the source of destruction of his own creator. After the mating of his mother and the forest officer, the forest officer commits suicide. That is the first sin; the officer is bound to be perished for the same. Similarly, after the marriage, Pran Nath is born but at the cost of his mother's life. She did not confess about her guilt and married a man from noble family. Thirdly, Bobby, who had ill-treated the beggar in the past, dies at last. Before his death, he accepts all his sins and has to face the death as penalty.

Pran Nath is sold as a eunuch to entertain the rich in Peshawar where by his skill and expertise he would save the prestige of the Muslim ruler. In his contact with the major, major's attitude towards him and the life changes. The man who was considered very strong and having the power of survival or to perish the Muslim kingdom, no more is interested in the affairs of the state. His help to Bobby again turns out to be the cause of his misery and consequential death. In Bombay, he is accepted by the missionaries. They were peaceful but with his entry into their lives, the things acquire a different shape. Bobby also has contacts with red light areas. He leads a life on tips given to him by the passengers. Both the ladies have to face the consequences of their help to Bobby.

Soon, on a night, when the natives are on the move of revenge against the Whites, he meets a White boy on the

road. He narrates to Bobby the story of his life. Bobby takes him to Brothel where he enjoys women. On return, they drink very heavily. The mob holding weapons in their hands rush towards them. Bobby leaves the boy at his fate in the street and hides himself behind the building. When the mob disappears, he comes out to see his friend, he finds him dead. His contact with Bobby has caused him death. Everyone has to help him by his sacrifice. Soon he is in London where without any problems he is accepted as Bridgeman.

In Africa, now, the wheel of fortune acquires a different shape allowing him to materialize his ideas to work with the Star's father for the betterment of the natives. Which in contemporary Africa, was the violation of law. He worked hard with the essence of humanism and sacrificed his life to pacify the native spirit.

Hari Kunzru has put forth the conflict between the evilic and angelic elements in his novel 'The Impressionist'. This conflict, no doubt, is a global phenomena.

References:

1. Hari Kunzru: The Impressionist