



## Postcolonial Politics in Irwin Allan Sealy's *Hero: A Fable*

N. Vijaya Kumari\*

PhD Research Scholar

Department of English

Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

Dr. D. Shanmugam\*\*

English wing, DDE

Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

Although Irwin Allan Sealy divides his time between India and New Zealand, he remains very much an Indian-English writer. Each of his novels to date, *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle*, *Hero: A Fable*, and *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar*, bring something distinctly Indian to what is, after all, a European literary form. In *The Trotter-Nama* Sealy adapts the Indian epic *nama* form, a form once used to flatter emperors, and ideally suited to Sealy's expansive and digressive style, whereas in *Hero* he transfers the formulaic "masala movie" of India's popular and prodigious film industry from celluloid to paper. In *The Everest Hotel* he continues his interest in the form of the novel but leaves behind some of the more irksome postmodernist games that marked the earlier novels. What clearly links these three apparently disparate novels is Sealy's gift for storytelling.

The most famous novel of Sealy *Hero: A Fable* succeeds the debut novel, *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle*, which recontextualizes the history of Anglo-Indians in British India, by including them in the narrative centre of his reinforcing historical drama, and thus relocating them from their historically silenced position along the sidelines during the era of the English regime and after independence of India.

*Hero: A Fable* is a mocking narrative that shows the frailty and extravaganza of the Bollywood film industry and the cunning tone of Indian politics exploded in postcolonial India. The novel connects the life of Hero, an anonymous actor from a hamlet in South India, who emerges to stardom in the Bollywood, then for allegedly whimsical impulses turns his hand to Indian politics, ultimately becoming India's Prime Minister. Yet, his primary dream to enhance the lives of millions of the poverty-stricken people and to uproot the corruption that pervades in every part of Indian society converts into a single-minded commitment to handle every aspect of substantial and promising resistance.

The parallel creation of Sealy that founds Delhi politics as mime of the Bollywood cinema is openly parodic. Yet, it is crucial to determine how parody as a literary device works in *Hero: A Fable*, since, as Linda Hutcheon asserts in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century*

*Art Forms*, it can be messed up with other devices such as “pastiche, burlesque, travesty, plagiarism, quotation, allusion and especially satire” (25).

Sealy, in *Hero: A Fable*, makes a funny remark on the aesthetics of Bollywood cinema by inserting parodic tone in his novel the established conventions used by Hindi films alongside a self-referential exaggerated exposure of the inventiveness of the novel. He organises his fiction in the style of a conventional Bollywood film that involves the making of stereotypical villains and heroes, who are later moved to a sarcastic criticism of Indian politics, when Hero, the actor, having been literally injured by the fictional villain Nero, gets away from the films to make spotlight in Delhi politics, where he is eventually shot dead by Zero, political and film scriptwriter.

It is great to see that Sealy is writing from within India, for an Indian readers, and thus not from a materializing viewpoint, in which Indian cultural aesthetics become a phenomenon of knowledge. Sealy is rather creating an Indian cultural aesthetic in its own legacy, one that resembles with native Indian culture.

It is enticing to contend that *Hero: A Fable* is an Indian fiction instead of a postcolonial work. Yet, it may be both, instead of one or the other. In *Hero: A Fable* there are points regarding ideals of postcolonial independence, or freedom of India and democracy, which are ridiculed through the Delhi political scene and become a too much cheering of political conspiracy and autocratic power, using up its own self-referential dreams and carrying a firm similarity to that of the Bollywood films. Instead of looking back to empire, the term “postcolonial” may be better placed as a current series of power recirculation and transmutation as in the work, where like villains and heroes, binaries revamp themselves from different contexts, changing referentiality and reversing roles. The referents for the binaries may evolve but their primary structure endures, so that instead of a revolutionary dethroning of imperial power, there are variations of identical hierarchic power within India, after the freedom from British Empire.

The present paper will assert that through a sarcastic meta-fictional exposure of Delhi politics and Bollywood film industry, in *Hero: A Fable* Sealy questions the formation and recirculation of imposing power structures, which add in their range the terms of creation of a postcolonial stature that is postulated on ideas of independence, democracy and freedom. This questioning happens through an ethically unique Indian aesthetic that as an analogy impairs empowered Western thought forming.

In *Hero: A Fable*, Sealy’s satirical deconstruction and meta-fictional practices of distinct binary compositions impair the elementary activity of both postcolonial and colonial discourses, these discourses are established through a realism conceived from certain representations of what it signifies to be colonized and colonizer, and what the notions of liberation from British Empire are found.

Zero, scriptwriter, in *Hero: A Fable* on one level, recounts in a most sarcastic, self-deprecatory manner could be regarded as a parody on present-day Indian politics through the sarcastic parallel that is contrived between it and the prevalent Indian cultural aesthetic, the Bollywood film. At another level, it is a self-reflexive meta-fictional probe into how fiction and the worlds outside of fiction are created.

Sealy is challenging the approach of the writer as a sole inventor of originality. The writer should perform within the genres and conventions of the fiction that have been inherited through years. He can reform them a little, but his artistic articulation is still formed by the cultural and linguistic ambience he belongs to from being a part of a specific community.

In *Hero: A Fable*, Zero pens the tale of the life of Hero from when he is conceived on the honeymoon of his parent in Kanyakumari to his unexpected and brutal death, gunned by Zero in

Delhi. The design of Hero, who as an output of story and form is marked off by literary traditions, is comparable to the postmodern theme, which is decided by cultural and linguistic establishments. Hero re-creates himself to political hero from reel hero, but the resilience of his election, accomplished on the commitment of relieving from the pain of the people, converts into an impassioned paranoia tried at having power at all costs. Thus power becomes his singular target. Highlighting the fictional inception of villains and heroes, Sealy is satirizing humanist beliefs of heroism, exhibiting how it is contrived on binary thought that play off hero against villain, and likewise on the audience's narcissistic projections, by which the hero one can watch on the cinema-screen imitates or is made to imitate the audience's dreams of heroism. Dreams of the hero, the saviour, the rescuer emerge from the faith of audience in the force of human conviction or agency to impact revolution.

However Sealy's Hero is absolutely an Indian hero instead of one hinge on a Western miniature. Sealy jokingly presents the reversal of stereotypes between South and North India, which disquiets the privileging of North Indian film stars on the grounds of their physical appearance. In so doing, he is recreating the traditional "masala mix" of Bollywood films.

As characters in *Hero: A Fable* change between villain and hero, mostly the opposites fuse, by that causing an inconsistency of meaning, and often breaking any ample variation in spite of the ostensible oppositions. These metamorphoses reveal changeovers between antagonist and protagonist, and the standards they portray in Bollywood films and traditional novel.

By the end of the story, Hero becomes progressively nefarious, having to retain power at all costs defending the potential actions, and trying to resist the right of people in action and thought. What this linguistic buoyancy generates is an interruption of the emotional commitment of reader with the ethics illustrated by the hero and challenged by the villain, or with the recognition with stereotypes of evil and good. It maybe dissuades the readers of a ultimate twist in the story's closure.

In a similar tone, the fiction that moves between Delhi politics and Bollywood film industry exposes the narrative technique as an ever-changing field of reproductions or artistic recycling that holds in the binary composition of copy and original. Customarily, a true original has normally been evaluated commercially and aesthetically over an imitation or a copy. Yet, in the contemporary postmodern condition, there are chiefly reproductions or identical copies. The recycling of art forms within a postcolonial context, yet, does obtain another form of interference that complexes the privileging of a postmodern learning. The adoption of local intertextual allusions such as pre-colonial myths and narratives and postcolonial cultural forms, including Indian movie, manifest culture-specific insights, which bother Western cultural and literary concerns. It is argued that the bi-lingual reader with specific cultural insight will study the postcolonial context at various standards from the reader without insight of local references.

The idea of multiple centres is a significant aspect, because it pre-empts the ease with which the postcolonial aesthetics can become ruthlessly fastened not only to its colonial past, but also to the postcolonial present, at the cost of being firmly instilled in the cultural conventions and forms of the postcolonial country itself. The notion of multiple centres, regionally grounded, drives the postcolonial away from always coming over the control of Western sorts of cultural discourses and knowledge and towards those that are endemic to the country itself, while combining new aesthetic structures that emerge from being placed in a global context.

Sealy is, thus, deconstructing the binary power links in all aspects of monolithic forms, including those of post-colonialism, and postmodernism, since what raises are everlasting renewals of power structures that may be briefly displaced, only to be noticed reappearing in another posture.

The resemblance between the Delhi politics and Bollywood cinema is very openly, for both produce dramas that incite the fantasies and dreams of the nation. Ranga's promotion to the stardom in the screenplay by Zero, through imploring to national pride, makes a myth or dream in the psyche of the people that he can make change in their lives, through his political endeavours.

Yet, as the inefficiency of Ranga to reform the plight of the lives of people becomes progressively evident, it also becomes very clear that elementary change of power does not essentially guarantee liberation from suppression, nor is Indian rule can mitigate the bias of the past. As Hero becomes further despotic and paranoid, more people start to vanish. It seems that Hero sees the judiciary as a menace to his power and has confiscated it also the media, justifying the repressing of liberty in order to finally protect them, thus creating an absolute parody of democracy and beliefs of liberation. Liberation for human race is part of culture's illusion of the independent affair, which conveys agency and can create change as part of the human efforts towards enlightenment. Zero, criticising on the politics driving to the general election, shows the falsehood behind party politics.

Sealy is challenging the traditions of fiction in being the hero shot at the climax; Hero does not live blissfully ever after. Yet, this does not eliminate the idea of heroism, for there is always another hero to be conceived. The gun-shooting proposes an entanglement within a specific narrative form with some choices for change; the "masala" may be altered but only within the linguistic forms that already prevail. Ideas such as heroism are endured through ideological and political structures that are constantly reformulated.

In *Hero: A Fable*, Sealy uses the postmodern techniques of deconstruction and meta-fiction, along with satire and parody to doubt an elemental postcolonial ideology implied on democracy, self-governance, and liberation from British Empire. The very myth of power is confronted through the sarcastic interface between the wondrous exuberances of the Bollywood film industry and Delhi political machinations. In the process, other forms such as postmodernism, humanism, and traditional Indian and European artistic patterns are examined, for these conventions and terms can fall prey to a literary apathy through which they remain to advertise themselves.

The doubt that rises is whether the postmodern practices of Sealy create an aesthetic that is postcolonial, or it is something different. The culture-specific insight, including that of the Indian politics and movies, along with the recreating of English as a spoken and written language within a provincial Indian background, signify that *Hero: A Fable* may be regarded as associated with both an Indian and a postcolonial aesthetic: one that undermines Western cultural imperialism or the supremacy of Western cultural systems, philosophy, and vision, as well as the grand narratives of postcolonial liberation. From the latter context, Sealy can be post-modernizing post-colonialism, but fairly his postcolonial aesthetics may be asserted to reshape his postmodern fictional processes.

In the novel, *Hero: A Fable*, it is through the postmodern practices of Sealy that privileged power statuses are deconstructed. The postcolonial discourse is reassessed as part of the imperialistic imperative of totalizing structures that offers its own privileging inclinations. The background of the novels draws attention to Orientalist discourses, marginal positions, narrative omniscience, and political opposition at a local level, cultural and racial hybridity as the way of understanding power dynamics.

It becomes evident that an oppositional "writing back to empire" kind of postcolonial discourse is untenable because it solely overturns the current situation and that temporarily, for there is always another centre of power waiting in the wings to wrest privilege. Through the expanding frontiers of marginalization, the novels echoes a mixed site of negotiation and compromise, which creates a postcolonial aesthetic that grasp together several different narrative strands while admitting

the ideological cracks within its own structure. Therefore, the postmodern and a revised postcolonial are for Sealy necessarily interweaved.

### References

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Mishra, Vijay, and Bob Hodge. "What Is Post(-) Colonialism?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. 276-90.

Sealy, Irwin Allan. *Hero: A Fable*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1991.