

# Re-Colonization of Postcolonial Subjecthood: American Culture Industry as a Hegemonic Tool

<sup>1</sup>Shaista Malik

<sup>2</sup>Wajid Riaz

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Ansar Mehmood

## Abstract

*The current research seeks to unearth political dimensions of American capitalism propagated through American Culture Industry. American market rules the world through its hegemonic control over culture industry. This alliance between capitalist market and various forms of mass media provides ideological tool for alienating the inhabitants of the former colonies from realizing the true nature of their bondage. It sets to prove that happiness and freedom propagated by American determined mass media is nothing more than illusion and inhabitants of former colonies are in-fact labouring under the compulsion to buy American products. In spite of achieving nominal freedom, the subjects of former colonies are taken into stringent clutches of western culture and despite their hatred and disliking for colonizers they boldly imitate their life style and feel proud to embrace an American identity. Western, technologically developed countries, particularly America inculcates inferiority complex in post-colonial subjects. They feel that they will be able to improve their inferiority complex by using brands advertised by western mass media. The research sets to substantiate that although a nominal decolonization has been achieved in most of the colonies yet according to our contention this is nothing more than a token liberation in which neo-imperial powers use hegemonic tools instead of coercive devices. We contend that it is worse than the former colonization for being deceptive and subtle and the American market tightens the shackles rather than breaking them in a deceptive way.*

**Keywords:** Re-colonization, American Culture Industry, Hegemony, Postcolonial, Goddess for Hire

---

<sup>1</sup> Hazara Univerity, Mansehra

<sup>2</sup> The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Sargodha

<sup>3</sup> The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Sargodha

## 1. Introduction

Post-colonial theory investigates the validity of colonial discourses and practices and provides us an insight into reasons and outcomes of Western colonial supremacy over eighty percent of the world in past. It also enquires into hegemonic 'Culture Industry' <sup>4</sup> used to subjugate thought processes of Third World inhabitants. Post-colonial theory offers an explanation for global inequalities maintained not only through the allocation of capital but also through hegemonic control over western culture machine (western mass media) and through this investigation this theory provides means to subvert hegemonic structures. Robert Young contends:

"Post-colonialism claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being ...it seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between different peoples of the world"(2).

Apart from capturing and controlling, others' nation, soil and commodities, colonialism restructured the economies of conquered countries by making flow of human and natural resources between occupied and colonial states easy. Annia Loomba says that irrespective of the direction of human labour and natural resources, the economic lucre always coursed back to the imperial centre (Loomba, 3). After granting nominal freedom to the colonies and paradigm shift American Capitalism penetrates into farthest parts of the world by making people loathe their own indigenous culture. Through its 'Culture Industry' America sends the message that an individual's welfare and felicity is determined by purchasing goods framed in America (Sassatelli 515). The American hegemonic culture spreads the vision that spending money on made-in-America-products leads to success and happiness.

---

<sup>4</sup>This term was coined by Frankfurt School critical philosophers and theorists Marx Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno and was used in *Dialectics of Enlightenment in 1944*. Frankfurt School critics likened popular culture i.e. film, television, radio, magazines, etc with factory which produces standardized products on mass scale. The products i.e. the news and entertainment programs made by culture Industry are used to dilute the resistance of the people and manoeuvre society into passiveness.

A capitalist country like America depends upon the succession of production and consumption (i.e. supply and demand) which requires the constructing, socialization and reverberation of the psychosomatic grounding for persistent consumption. Thus current commercialized identities are fashioned by the forces of consumption, patronized by media-advertisement, educational and societal institutions that assist to generate zealous clients from Third World to push the profit centred capitalist financial system.

Paul Stiles (Stiles, 8) has recognized wealth as of foremost importance in America's new emerging capitalism at the outset of twentieth century. American business magnates realised that to flourish America, it needs to expand its business far beyond geographical, cultural, religious boundaries. Anything that obstructed this economic pursuit and challenged its market domination and its consequential cultural supremacy was considered a *bête noire*. Such a market dictated culture deems individual simply as economic entity: supplier, purchaser, manufacturer, merchandise, hence disposable.

## **2. Statement of the Research**

The study will see the role of American based Culture Industry in subjugating and enslaving post-colonial subjects ideologically in *Goddess for Hire*. This study will also see how after the token freedom granted to the former colonies was not the genuine liberation, rather, the tactic of rule and domination changed from a coercive force to ideological control of the mindset of the colonized people. The new Imperial power America has been in perpetual prowl to bond formally liberated people to American market to earn money. The research will examine the severity of control of market over consciousness of people who feel proud and honoured in buying American brands. The project sets to see that the post-colonial subjects are unhinged from their true destination of self-exploration and are moving towards a false Self glamorized by USA market.

### **2.1 Research Questions**

The current research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which aspects of cultural hegemony have been highlighted by Sonia Singh in her novel *Goddess for Hire*?

2. How does American capitalism impact consciousness of the people from former colonies depicted in the *Goddess for Hire*?
3. Why do the characters show alienation from their indigenous culture?

## **2.2 Objectives of the Research**

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify various aspects of US hegemony and its adverse impact on post-colonial societies as highlighted in the novel *Goddess for Hire*.
2. To prove with the help of novel and secondary sources that neo-imperial policies of the USA are playing a major role in subjugating the consciousness of the people from former colonies.

## **2.3 Significance of the Study**

Many studies have been conducted on consumer culture and its impact on the consciousness of the people, but no study so far has been conducted to see the impact of America's fast burgeoning capitalism and its deep penetrating influence on mind set of people from former colonies. The research holds signification considering my location as a post-colonial subject gripped by American market. It aspires to untangle all those ideological tools used to distract the subjects of colonies from materializing true liberation. It is right time to raise consciousness amongst the people against this tight clasp of American cultural hegemony which goes unnoticed under rhetoric of consumer's choice, and we being Pakistanis at the crossroads can't afford to lose prospects of freedom from cultural colonization.

## **3. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

The present research is a descriptive and analytical study and it is an intersection of Postcolonial and Marxist framework. Post-colonial theory is adopted to gauge the impact of American capitalism on consciousness of the subjects. The concept of 'Culture Industry' has been rendered by Marxist theorists affiliated with Frankfurt School, which has been employed in this research. The research exposes the victimization of capitalism to earn consumer dollars from people of former colonies by using America dictated mass media. The major text selected for analysis is *Goddess for Hire* by an

Indian writer Sonia Singh. Sonia Singh exposes in a brilliant manner alienating effect of cultural hegemony perpetuated by Western mass media, she also shows through her fictional presentation the political consequences of this hegemonic control in stifling all resistance in former colonies.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Hegemony

The term hegemony was used by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to investigate the power of the dominant group in society to further its own interests. Gramsci opined that the ruling class becomes successful in convincing the dominated groups that its interests are the interests of the society on the whole. The dominated groups become complicit in their subjugation by giving consent to be dominated. The writers *Key Terms of Postcolonialism* (Ashcroft, et al, 116) explain the term as in this system domination is achieved not by brutal, physical force, or by active persuasion but by having a more subtle and more inclusive power over the economy, and state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the interest of the ruling class is presented as the common interest and thus come to be taken for granted.

In Marxist philosophy, the term cultural hegemony describes the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, who manipulates the culture of that society by tampering with beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores of the society so that their ruling-class worldview becomes the worldview that is imposed and accepted as the cultural norm; as the universally valid dominant ideology that justifies the social, political, and economic status quo as natural, inevitable, perpetual and beneficial for everyone, rather than as artificial social constructs that benefit only the ruling class.

In the current scenario hegemony is considered as the geopolitical method of indirect imperial dominance by West with USA taking lead. In this latest domination powerful states like America rule the subordinate states by selling its products and by improving its economy. While the indigenous culture and values, economical structures and political structures crumble because of this system.

## 4.2 American Cultural Hegemony

Last decade of the late century witnessed an emergence of concepts of 'cultural imperialism', 'media imperialism', 'cultural dependency', 'cultural hegemony' and 'electronic colonialism'. Postcolonial critics aspire to understand and pick apart the roots of cultural shaping of the lesser developed parts of the world by technologically developed countries. These critics opine that the modern industrial moguls and technocratic empires have been colonial powers in past like Britain and France and also the neo-imperial state America. The term 'cultural hegemony' signifies that the demise of direct political and monetary command has not given way to intellectual liberation but a new type of cultural hegemony has started. This new form of hegemony nurtures culture which depletes the strength of developing states and lets USA based international organizations to eclipse indigenous cultures.

The traditional western approaches celebrated the relationship between 'west' and 'east' in international communications. They saw new mass media as precursor of political and economic progression for the under-developed countries. But the postcolonial writers envision perils for the developing countries in the technological dependence. They perceived such western systems, particularly American, as a threat to the existence of indigenous traditions and attempts to persuade regional people to get immersed in western-style pluralism and diversity through consumerism.

Post-colonial cultural theorists see consumerism as hegemonic western tool to earn consumer dollar by relegating the indigenous culture to the lowest rungs of cultural hierarchies and of social control engrossed to manufacture western identity for the people belonging to former colonies. Neo-colonies with America taking lead apply 'techno power' to accustom colonized people's preferences to discard their national identities and be deluged in an American identity.

A Marxian writer Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American Dream* sheds light on how and why advertising became a determiner of people's self-image (363) across the globe. He analyses cautiously when and why people of the world were sold American Dream. After the collapse of Wall Street and subsequent economic depression, America researched into striking new

ways to breed and play on people's anxieties and offer comfort for the diseased masses. American economic Depression of 1930's forced America to use its cultural industry i.e. radio broadcasts, print media including glossy magazines, and newspapers, electronic media like television and its film industry Hollywood to advertise its products and encourage an enduring "consumption ethic across the globe." American products were advertised and hence cultural industry became America's backbone. Through advertisement identities of people are crafted and they are ideologically manipulated.

Borrowing Louis Althusser's terminology, Kinchloe (138) substantiates that in current time period neo-colonial powers do not require 'coercive apparatuses' to impose their cultural values. Powerful mass media insidiously handles the subjectivities of people of third world by manipulating them ideologically. Kincheloe (138) argues that in a technocratic period conditioning the minds of the people ideologically without making them conscious of the manipulative process is easy. These giant power groups employ media rather than police or military to enforce a colonial identity on its subjects where corporate power is consolidated. He argues that media discourses serve the purposes of giant corporations and craft identities of the people. These giant powers design certain culinary wants, practices and dressing norms for people which are followed religiously by the people.

Kincheloe traces the causes for rapid McDonaldisation of indigenous cultures of the world culture. McDonald became popular all across the globe within decades. He argues that McDonald's products were consumed by ethnicities residing in America to get accepted as Americans. Consumption of McDonald's product was a gesture of occupying centre for marginalized groups in America. McDonald provided an American mask for those marginalized groups who wanted to discard their ethnic identities and wanted to be merged in 'mainstream America'. Ray Kroc, the proprietor of this food chain recognized that this food point is not only selling burgers, soft drinks and fries rather in reality it is selling 'American vision itself'. Kincheloe argues that McDonalds achieved this popularity via its media crusades for it projected itself not as an American institution but as America itself. In these media campaigns eating McDonald's burgers and fries

symbolizes a healthy gesture of nationalism. The consumption was a blatant sign of assimilation in a xenophobic culture, hence ethnic minorities were demanded to participate in this nationalistic ritual to show their affiliation with American nationalism. The ad campaigns of this food chain displayed all relevant signs of American patriotism i.e. American flag flew for 24 hours a day. Boas and Chains in *Big Mac* confirm that McDonald used 'the costliest, most ambitious ad campaign in American history' (38) to confirm McDonald association and affiliation with America.

To make its grip long lasting, McDonalds initiated socializing the children to consume its products in the last quarter of the late century. Seeking help from renowned psychologists, McDonalds explored and tapped impulsive nature of children. American business chains dilute the subversive and radical instinct of the subject nations by controlling their children's minds at such an early stage of their lives. Imperialistic motivations of American corporate can be realized from the caustic fact that children are conditioned to devalue and denigrate their national products and prioritize American products and services as higher-ranking. This corporate colonialism demands well managed socially moulded and consumption tailored individuals. The ad campaigns run on media wins the consent of children to such an extent that they pledge to serve the concerns of American corporate. These children are trained from their infancy to become devout consumers of American chains products. Corporate functionaries wield unimaginable fiscal and ideological results by these ad campaigns since they gush huge money into ads aimed directly at children.

Spigel (*Welcome to the Dream House* 6) notes the 'homogenization and normalization' of colonized children through culture industry and its insidious impact on the children of destabilized countries. He argues that American media produces 'corporate children' by omitting all differences and imposing uniformity and homogeneity. American culture industry and market shapes the preferences of these children and resistance against cultural hegemony seems pretty impossible. Spigel quotes a number of children dreaming of starting their chains of American fast food in decolonized countries. Spigel equates it with 're-colonization of the decolonized colonies' (Spigel, 4). This re-colonization of the consent and

---

mindset of the people from infancy indicates conformity bordering on slavery rather than challenging and subverting it.

David Cook gauges the impact of this cultural hegemony on the mind of the children by quoting that even children living in war ravaged Iraq and Vietnam do not question the role of American political and military intervention in these countries. They are, rather, won over by American corporate culture whole heartedly (65). The hegemonic culture perpetuated by these fast food venues has penetrated so deep that even schools are being used to promote consumer habits in post-colonies. McDonalds and other fast food restaurants have monopolized school cafeterias much to the alarm of many child- health advocates.

George Ritzer in *McDonalization of Society* tries to explore the dependent relation between burgeoning fast food industry and other corporate (17). Ritzer opines that this rapidly growing fast food chain and its hegemonic ideology has gripped many other facets of human life in and outside the geographical boundaries of America. Museums, office edifices, cafeterias in offices, hotels, railway lounges, airports, school buildings, colleges and universities have been impinged upon by the ideology of western cultural superiority. The ubiquitous presence of fast food industries like McDonald, KFC, Taco Bell, Long John Silver, Pizza Hut in all imaginable places has become the determining factor in the lives of postcolonial subjects. No country seems to be resistant to the hegemonic culture presented by these ideologies. Mid-East countries including war-devastated Beirut and Iraq have been completely commanded by McDonald and many of its clones like McDonal and Matbax. Impressed by the success of McDonalds, these fast food industries inaugurated their chains in Iraq recently. Ritzer claims that India has long been McDonalized with its own string of fast food restaurants hence mushrooming process continues. This popularity of these American Fast food chains indicates towards people's passion to embrace and love anything that is American. American products give them an aura, a class, a prestige which they demand desperately even at the expense of their national culture.

American cultural hegemony can be gauged from the fact that it is expanding its business across the world and the countries that do not obey

America's capitalist dictates are driven out of business. Iraq and Syria are examples in particular. Ritzer uses the term 'vertical McDonalization' for this commercial coercion (Ritzer 12). To meet the needs of McDonald and its clones, the local meat and potato producing industries have to provide its products at very low prices which accounts for dramatic increase in its production. American industrial mogul does not take into consideration the ecological problems caused by American industries.

An African Marxian theorist Kwame Nkrumah in *Neocolonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* considers this penetration of industrial might into developing third world countries as a continuation of imperialism under the guise of 'globalization'. He calls this a new and more subtle and insidious face of colonialism. Nkrumah says that the poor neo-colonized state does not enjoy sovereignty in practice, although it is considered a sovereign state. America controls political and economic institutions rigidly from outside. The governments of these countries play only the role of puppets in America's mighty hands. For the developed west, globalization signifies dominance without accountability but for the dominated it is abusive without any remedy or recompense. Nkrumah states that American hegemony over indigenous businesses of the third world is anti-democratic and is fully supported by neo-colonial privileged class which becomes complicit in joining hands with western investors, the IMF and the World Bank. He explains the procedures of western multi-national organizations and foundations in former colonies and the stage of imperialist financial monopoly over these countries' economics. Dominance over the state policy in the neo-colonial country can be guaranteed by paying cost to run the state, by providing machinery of bureaucrats in top slots from where they can command political obedience of the state and get fiscal control of poor countries by imposing a banking system prescribed by the colonial authority. A state in clasps of neo-colonialism is not the master of its destiny. Nkrumah writes that this control over indigenous business and culture is Western imperialism in the mask of neo-liberalism and globalization.

This form of capitalism is not under control of any culture or government. The power of this ideology can be reflected through this bitter reality that at present it is hard to dream any other option to international neo-liberal capitalist economy. Robert Young points that the dialectical nature of

capitalism is even bleaker than one can conceive of by current disclosure that many anti multinational organizations like Global Exchange that tries to shut down the World Bank and the World Trade Organization are being funded by multinational organizations like Unilever, Ben and Jerry's ice cream (Young, 137). The reason for this capitalist hegemony is that capitalism has commercialized its opposition to the level that it also coordinates and increments the making of that opposition.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Americanization of Culture

The pernicious impact of America's cultural hegemony has not been theorized only by postcolonial theorists, some third world fiction writers engage their literary skills to unveil America's hideous agenda in their recent fiction. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine, Ms. India, The Tiger's Daughters*, Kavita Daswani's *The Village Bride of Beverly Hills*, Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry*, *Trespassing* by Uzma Khan and *Goddess for Hire* by Sonia Singh discuss in elaborate and interesting manner third world subjects oscillating between their native culture's identity and cultural claims of their host country, America. The current chapter however focuses on ubiquity of American brands in the life of people belonging to third world as depicted in an Indian novel *Goddess for Hire*. The textual analysis of the novel will be based on framework developed in the second chapter. major characters, along with their situation, dialogues and practices will be scrutinized to see the impact of cultural hegemony on developing countries' cultures.

*Goddess for Hire* foregrounds the superficially enticing but dreadful reality of the third world coming in stringent grip of hegemonic culture, where people's critical faculties are determined by American brands and no other thought ruffles their consciousness. The writer Sonia Singh indicates by a barrage of foreign brands that the characters hardly purchase anything local which shows their disregard to the indigenous culture and affiliation to a hegemonic culture. The substitution of the products by foreign brands has become a significant vista of power of a hegemonic culture by using the tropes of globalization. The novel shows how American business expands by boosting its brands by manipulating consumers in the name of freedom of choice. The characters in the novel are faced with a serious conflict of

selecting between US cultural affiliation or indigenous culture's subscription. The leading lady of the novel Maya Mehra undergoes a serious cultural conflict orbiting around American values. She is an Indian, has brown complexion, but she shows complete allegiance to America in her thinking patterns, avocations, and personal orientations. Her complexion makes her a conspicuous ethnic figure in her vicinity and American class fellows make fun of her. She is known by the neighbours and in school as 'Gandhi girl'. Subsequently, she undergoes identity crises and all her trouble to embrace American brands is done to hide her ethnicity. Maya has been presented as the 'other' who deliberately imitates American life style and thereby she dissociates herself from her Indian heritage so that she can be accepted by the Beverly Hills' upper class. Still, she is unable to turn into a complete and identical member in America.

Apart from highlighting the cultural dilemma of Maya Mehra, Sonia Singh complicates the plot of the novel by introducing another quandary i.e. choice of a husband. The amorous plot of the novel hinges around Maya Mehra's desire to wed an American husband and her family's command to bring an Indian husband for her who would make her a traditional Indian bride. The Indian husband and his mother Pinky Sahni project their desire on Maya to be a traditional Indian submissive wife. The husband chosen for her belongs to an affluent but traditional Indian family. He expects Maya to cook and clean for the family and respect them, apart from wearing traditional Indian dresses and showing regard for Indian culture. Maya stepped only once in India to meet Indian husband -to- be, but she starts questioning her Indian heritage and begins to show conspicuously innumerable aspects of US culture in her daily life.

Mehras receive their cousin Nadia who has come from India to pay visit to them. Maya sees Nadia wearing 'a daffodil pink Sari' (46) which she finds 'ugly and repulsive' (46) because of her Indian dress. At another occasion she finds Nadia wearing a 'light blue salwar kameez' (48) which is not approved by her. She coaxes Nadia to get a western make-over and new western clothes and haircut. Nadia is taken to 'Malini or even 'Brookshields' to change from an Indian to American appearance. Nadia also succumbs to US hegemony when she decides to dress in western attire for work. When Nadia's fiancé Sanjay comes to meet her at Mehra's, he does not like her in

western make-over. Nadia already alienated from Indian traditions is further distanced from her culture by telling Sanjay starkly to leave her alone. By subscribing to American hegemony she goes against the subordinate culture without paying heed to the consequences of such embroilment.

Repeated references to 'Coca-cola', McDonald's, 'Kodak camera' and 'Dolce and Gabbana' draw readers' attention towards the hegemony of the western corporate and western capitalism which is penetrating deeply in developing countries. Maya's brother Samir is another important character of the novel who studies in a medical school in America. During the course of the novel, he meets Maya only once when he comes back from his hostel to spend a few days with his family at home. His conversation seems to be devoid of any feelings, any serious commitment towards life, rather it becomes only a string of various American gadgets and appliances. Samir, a typical product of American dream, is 'happily consumed by gadgets' and narrates various functions of 'disoman, hand-held Nintendo, mobile phone and a talking calculator' (Singh, 21) and zealously exhibits his belongings which serve not only as a statement of his affluent status but the hold of American hegemonic capitalism on the mindset of the people. This particular incidence shows that brands hold central position in the lives of these people and they and their relations and personalities are determined by these brands and for that very reason people consume these items as they are indicative of their status.

In family functions and gatherings, essential food stuff is pizza and Coke as Samir observes, 'pizza specked the carpet and Coke stained it' (Singh, 162). Nowhere are the characters in the novel shown drinking natural water. The characters are obsessed with soft drinks like Pepsi, Coca-Cola and other western soft drinks which are highly popular in third world. In almost all social settings depicted in the novel, soft drinks are used extravagantly and serve as a statement of hegemonic grip over preferences of the people. A religious character Pundit Ram Chand, comes from India to America to take Maya Mehra along. He is a traditional Indian immersed in typical Indian dress of a pundit, shown disgust by Maya in the course of the story. He is severely obsessed with Coke. On getting Pepsi he forgets all his religious temperance and quarrels with everyone in the restaurant. The reason he gives for 'unspiritual fit' is, 'Pepsi is too sweet' (15). Maya takes him to a

trendy American restaurant where he vehemently demands Coke, but the restaurant cannot fulfil his desire because Coke is not available. He takes one long sip of Pepsi, and then shows unpleasant feelings on his face by commenting, 'I am having a very serious Pepsi problem in this country' (58). Initially Maya cannot put up with him for his queer Indian dress and his Indian manners, but later on when he lets himself be hegemonized by American culture, Maya befriends him. She embraces him and informs him that she wants to make the evening memorable by 'picking up a case of Classic Coke' (134) for him. Ram's elation can be gauged from his glowed up face and he comments smiling 'Just the thing I was meditating on' (134). For a religious pundit meditation is reduced to dilemma between Pepsi and Coke. Existence of man, good, evil, temptation, karma, dharma and resurrection are not substantial issues meriting the meditation of a religious Pundit gripped by hegemonic culture.

Hegemonizing America cannot be discussed in detail unless American fast food chains and outlets are taken into consideration. Another very important member of Mehra family Aunt Dimple who is adept in match making and wedding family's pet projects is engaged in a heavy mission to find a proper husband for a spoiled girl Maya Mehra. The moment she gets to know about a single, wealthy Indian Tahir Sahni, she starts hatching a marriage plan between Tahir and Maya. To materialize her dream she sets out to meet Tahir's mother Pinki in India. The venue she chooses is a well-known food chain McDonald in Delhi. Narrating her experience to Maya, she is so excited about McDonald that she talks incessantly about its food and aura rather than terms and conditions settled with Pinki. She comments, 'I haven't actually met him, but his mother and I lunched at McDonalds. We ate the most delicious Macs.' (8). She opines that McDonalds tastes better in India than in America because that has been a status symbol in India.

Surrounded by American fast food outlets in America, Maya is obsessed with the burgers and fries offered by McDonalds. She shows a blatant disgust when faced with Indian traditional foods even in family functions and celebrations. Maya frequents one restaurant to another restaurant with her branded cell phone in one hand and a *Frappuccino* in the other. Apart from McDonalds Maya loves *Taco Bell* and its food. Maya invites her friends Sanjay and Ram at *Taco Bells* when they want to meet her officially for the

first time. In *Taco Bell*, Ram the pundit tastes quesadilla and tostada and instantly 'falls in love with them' and declares, 'I never tasted such a tasty food in my life, this is my favourite' (58).

Singh informs the readers that 'Indians love to assemble in Starbucks and consume mass quantities of Starbucks' (125) which is a coffee providing American chain. The company has opened its coffee house chains in 1980's toppling all geographical boundaries and earned for itself immense number of global clientele. Tahir, a typical traditional Indian, who used to abhor western life style and western food is dragged by the leading lady into various renowned food chains held by America, thus making his allegiance to hegemonic culture unconditional. When his initial antagonism for a foreign culture is subsided he expresses his love for Maya by offering her to take Maya to *Dolce* to dine. On her demand he also takes her to *Tangiers*, another trendy restaurant in Loss Angeles on Maya's birthday (213).

Maya Mehra claims, 'I live and breathe shopping' (87). Her consciousness has been drafted by *Sex and City*<sup>5</sup>. She associates her success and achievement with consuming American brands. Another marker of her affluent family background and her allegiance with American culture is her "canary yellow Hummer H2, a car that big that its tank needs some time to fill, in which a person can have a nap" (Singh, 1). Her possession of an expensive car makes a statement about her love and entrenchment with American identity. Maya wants desperately to enter Camino Real, for which end she uses 'a heavy dose of beauty and charm' (98) by lowering her 'Gucci' sunglasses and exposing her 'blue contact lenses' to the guard who tried to detain her from entering. The blue contact lenses speak loud of her desire to discard her Indian identity and embrace an American culture. When the guard refuses her entrance she makes crisp remarks going through the gate and shouts at the guard, "For God's sake I drive one of the most expensive American cars on the market!" (98). Maya's exclusion from the exclusive club meant only for privileged American socialites proves a severe blow to her ego, as hegemonic American culture sets limits to who can be the

---

<sup>5</sup> It is an American romantic drama that was meant to advertise beauty products to the female customers. It is considered as the first Chick Literature drama which became a model for many other chick lit dramas and novels written in the first decade of twenty first century.

member. The novel clearly displays desperate efforts of Indians to be assimilated into a dominant culture, but the dominant culture does not provide any prestige to the subject races, which are just a means of earning consumer dollars by drafting their preferences and nothing else.

Maya believes in accessorizing her appearance. Her outfits have to be accessorized with matching purse, jewellery, glasses in accordance with her affluent status. The writer informs us that Maya shops on her birthday and buys no less than twelve shopping bags full of trendy and voguish items. Her shopping list consists of all American brands like “Kate Spade bag” (20), “Seven jeans” (135). Her obsession with western brands advertises Maya’s longing to be absorbed in American culture

Mehra’s are a traditional Indian family settled in America and Mr. And Mrs. Mehra spurn at her subjection by US culture. They demand her to show respect for their culture by embracing it. Maya’s family is besides being very rich are adept professionals in their relative fields. Most of them are doctors. Maya is the only member of Mehra clan who shows no interest in academics or professionalism. Her only passion is to enter into Beverly Hills’ affluent class. Her dedicated subscription to American culture causes clash between her and her parents. On her engagement ceremony, Maya does not bother to wear anything traditional. She prefers to wear a Western brand. Her mother drifts her estranging looks and comments, ‘Why aren’t you wearing Indian clothes like Sari. The top is almost see-through’ (108). Least bothered about her parents’ concern and discomfort Maya informs her mother of the brand name by commenting in jest, ‘It’s not see-through, it’s C-line’ (108).

### **5.2 ‘Culture Industry’ As a Hegemonic Tool**

Sonia Singh unravels the deadly face of western advertising industry by illustrating that advertisements regarding western food are bombarded day in and out and the viewers are exposed to these images. The novel gives references to advertising industry promoting food items through appealing images on billboards, print and electronic media. The writer indicates the pernicious impact of the advertising agency on the children’s consciousness by creating Maya Mehra’s character. Maya is the second generation Asian American. Having been born in America she did not have any role models to follow other than American super models and media icons. Madonna and

Julia Roberts were her goddesses who coaxed her to accept Western hegemony by showing a glossy picture of their life styles. She openly confesses, 'I don't blast sitar music in my car, and I prefer *Madonna* and I turned up the volume and felt my spirits rise' (2). She watches, talks, walks like Jose Eber.

Fond of American movies since her childhood, *Harry Potter* is her favourite entertainment. However, to kill time she watches even *Exorcist*, *The Duchess of Obvious* and *Duke of Moods*. A passionate devotee of Hollywood, she loves watching Julia Robert's *Pretty Woman* and recalls the touching scenes at every crucial moment in life. This lover of Hollywood smash hits, among American sitcoms, she is fond of *Sex and The City* which is notorious for misleading American feminism struggle.

*Goddess for Hire* also foregrounds the role of mass media in upholding stylish norms to depict the insidious influence of cultural artifacts like projected and propagated images in shaping people's preferences and thereby alienating them from real selves. The novelist gives a bleak picture of Asians living in America, who are highly influenced by these mediated images. Sonia Singh through her fictional presentation informs that the people surrounded by hegemonic culture are alienated from their real selves and they copy westernized mediated images to such an extent that they craft their identities on them as models. For these uprooted and displaced people a fanciful world fabricated by mimicry and illusions stand for real life and identity rigorously conforms with a homogenous personal identity extolled by western role model; hence guiding to the demise of individual self. The people who succumb to the dominant culture are presented as true identity and worth imitation and who prove recalcitrant are taken as obstinate and tossed away.

*Goddess for Hire* depicts this confusion between real and mass mediated images. The novel deals with hegemonic culture Shaping Asians' experiences, aspirations, orientations and concept of self. The novel discloses restraints set by consumer culture to an Indian's evolution and it spotlights moral, rational and spiritual stagnancy of these characters. The prevalent culture around them inculcates a feeling of guilt for not complying with mass mediated mores. Consequently they yield to a powerful culture.

The characters in the novel inhabit the domain of American TV, reality shows and Hollywood, and various magazines. Reality and illusions are blurred for them. They pursue and religiously adhere to media that unwittingly they subject their true identity to a false identity. Her realness is focalized in the region of pretence, as signalled in the text when she is thinking as what to put on as exalted rank of goddess Kali comes on her shoulders. She is of the view that as yet American fashion and beauty magazines have failed to prescribe a dress code and make-up for an Indian goddess. Soaked in consumer identity she has never been interested in academics which is an issue of unease for her family. Maya's failure to get entrance in any medical institution further widens the gulf between Maya and her parents. She faces absolute boycott from her parents because she is unable to accommodate their parents' wish to become a doctor. Her emotional and intellectual maturation was halted at early stage when as a toddler she subscribed to western life style.

### **5.3 Commodification of Social Relations**

The novels offer a complete depiction of the commodification of social relations in a displaced and uprooted society. The discussion of different characters revolves about brands they own or the brands out of their reach but their aspiration to acquire them. The shallow physical pleasure and popular tastes are the only things they enjoy. Their mental processes are in stringent grasp of hegemonic culture industry to such an extent that they cannot perceive the negative impact of the unproductive and materialistic interaction they have with others in novels.

### **5.4 Degeneration of Traditional Values**

*Goddess for Hire* depicts characters' disregard for traditional norms held by people of former colonies. On the issue of marriage, Maya shows a completely western outlook. Inter family and religion marriage is the custom followed by Mehra clan. All her female cousins were properly married to Indian boys. The only exception is Maya Mehra who shows no interest in a traditional institution of matrimony. In reaction to insistence from family to get wedded, she tries to persuade her mother:

Mom, please understand that I'm not against marriage. If a great guy comes along, I'm not going to turn him away, but neither am I going

---

to rush into something I'm not ready for. I don't feel like there's this biological clock ticking away or anything' (169).

The family tries its best to persuade Maya to marry. Aunt Gyatri, a gynecologist by profession, employs medicinal terms to convince Maya to get married. She even puts in efforts to bring into play alarm of breast tumour. Maya gets frightened by this insistence and force and she takes flight to avert this painful gaze.

An unnecessary interest with consumerism is not a trademark of the chief character; other characters in the text also show their concern by purchasing one or the other item to redecorate themselves at the cost of their spirit. Her mother is obsessed with American movie celebs and Gyatri and Dimple redecorate their places after a short period of time to exhibit their financial position. A lot of trouble is created in fashionable restaurants by religious personalities like pundit Ram's fixation with Pepsi and Coca cola. Ram is a Brahman and invading wickedness is his duty but his like for soft drinks and MacDonald's are the disgusting facets of his character which are not under his control. At each critical moment when his concentration is desired, he is mourning over non availability of Coca Cola.

Maya is severely isolated and distanced from her family because of her immersion in materialistic culture. She does not talk to her intimate friend Ram and has not developed any familial relation with her mother in law. She is friend to no one and deplors that she has only 'credit card friendship' (260). She is even detached from self and is oblivious of her true identity.

She is just redrafting from one object to another and doesn't try to explore her true accomplishment. She discusses Bollywood characters with her mother as there is hardly anything else to be discussed. Moreover, she is still a teenager mentally. Once in grip of western 'Culture Industry' as a youngster, she cannot ascend that stage and remains fixed at basic level of her growth. Maya's identity is no more all-around as all the main characters in the novel live at a very basic level of physical. She lacks union of inner and outer selves. Her identity is grounded on detachment of the soul and the body. She makes a conscious endeavour to distance herself from her inside, psyche, feelings and emotions to attain an importantly western manifestation. When she hears that her mentor Ram meets an accident and

is admitted in a hospital, she does not trouble herself to pay him a visit. In spite of her goddess status, she maltreats Nadia in public and discloses her secret.

The novel certifies obviously that Maya equates her joys and accomplishment with images propounded by 'Culture Industry'. This substitution of unadulterated and noble ideals with false and egotistic ones involves horrible consequences both for community and person's wellbeing. The social results of media dictated famous customs and depiction of body icon contain a collapse of conventional relations between family unit and associates.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present research was carried out to see the role of 'Culture Industry' as a hegemonic tool of American capitalism in alienating people from their true selves, their families, friends and the real goal of their liberation. The analytical section ventured to answer two questions. Firstly, the research aimed to investigate the extent to which norms and values perpetuated by American 'Culture industry' impact the subject-hood of various characters in the novel. The analysis substantiated that the 'Culture Industry' encourages materialist values and norms which are detrimental to the growth of traditional cultural values as well as humans practising those values. The second question investigated how the Western hegemony is consolidated in the minds of the subjects from former colonies. The analysis demonstrated that through happy, independent, free and ultra-rich media icons 'culture Industry' sets bait on the consciousness of the people, who are bombarded with these illusory images round the clock. These subjects are trapped by these images of happiness, liberation and achievement.

The analysis also demonstrates that the bitter reality is that these subjects are unaware of their subjugation and do not struggle to set themselves free from hegemonic tool of American capitalism. These characters only administer to put together their exterior at the expense of inner strength and rebellious spirit. The novel shows that the modern self has gone off track in an image obsessed culture and in modern era all efforts to nurture self for a post-colonial subject only succeed in alienating them from their true selves. Their targets are directed towards achievement of wishes infused by mass media.

---

The more they go after self the harder the grasp of unnaturalness gets on them and weaker gets their identity.

### **6.1 Recommendations for Further Research**

This research was taken to gauge the effect of American 'Culture Industry' on the mindset of Postcolonial subject as seen by Sonia Singh in her novel *Goddess for Hire*. To unveil the real economic gains of these American industries further research in socio-economical field like Neo-Liberalism can be undertaken. The political and economic dimension of 'Neo-Imperial' and 'Neo-Liberal' policies can be investigated in the novel. The findings of the research can be shared with masses, particularly those who associate prestige with the westernized outlook to raise consciousness of the people as consciousness is the first step towards liberation.

### **References**

- Ashcroft, B. et al. (1998). *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London & NY: Routledge.
- Cook, D. (2004). *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Horkheimer, M., & Theodor, W. A. (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Amsterdam: Stanford University Press.
- Kincheloe, J, L. (1999). *How Do We Tell the Workers? The Socioeconomic Foundations of Work and Vocational Education*. USA: West View.
- Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/ Post-colonialism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Marchand, R. (1985). *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity*. University of California Press.
- Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Thomas & Nelsons & Ltd.
- Ritzer, G. (2007). *The McDonalozation of Society*. USA: CA University press.

Sassatelli, R. (2007). *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*. London: Sage Publishing Ltd.

Singh, S. (2004). *Goddess for Hire*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Spigel, L. (2001). *Welcome to the Dollhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. Durham, NC: Duke up.

Stiles, P. (2005). *Is American Dream Killing You? How the Market Rules Our Lives*. Harper Collins.

Young, R. J. C. (2003) *Post-colonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.