

**Parallel Session C: The Moral Dilemmas of Capitalism: Exploring Literary Perspectives**  
**14<sup>th</sup> March, 2024**

Chair: Bijay K. Danta

Presentations:

‘Capitalism, Culture, Agency: A Postcolonial Representation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s  
*Purple Hibiscus*’ by Khyati Sorathiya

‘Ngũgĩ waThiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*: Proletarian Novel and Christian Symbolism’ by  
Manish Solanki

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**Report by**

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The panel consisted of two presentations on novels from postcolonial Africa that examined how the vestiges of colonialism and capitalism shape contemporary Nigerian and Kenyan societies, respectively. Khyati Sorathiya’s paper looked at capitalism and the inhumanity it enshrines through the novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She utilises capitalism as a theoretical construct and as an entry point in the conflict between colonial and postcolonial African society and social structures, which necessarily includes the conflict between Christianity and other belief systems. For her, Eugene Achike, the authoritarian and violent father of the narrator in the novel, who promotes the use of English over the native Igbo and converts to Christianity, can be read as embodying the logic and violence of colonialism and imperialism. In reading the novel’s representation of the authoritarian and corrupt Nigerian government – whose measures caused rampant food

shortages and unemployment –Sorathiya brings out how the capitalist mode of development failed the newly postcolonial people.

Manish Solanki, the second presenter, attempted to frame Ngũgĩ waThiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1980) as a proletarian novel by examining the capitalist underpinnings of neocolonialism, and analysing Christianity through a Marxist point of view in his presentation. Focusing on the novel's widespread Christian imagery and symbolism, such as biblical parables and allegories, Solanki contends that the novel can be read as a 'postcolonial Bible' by Thiong'o. He finds that there is a subversion of biblical episodes and figures, such as the crucifixion of the Devil instead of Christ, in the title to begin with. For Solanki, the Devil can be understood as representing the neo-colonialist forces of the Global North and the disciples of the Devil can be understood to be the Kenyan bourgeoisie who collude to exploit the working class, peasants and students.

The questions from the audience spanned a diverse range of concerns. Sorathiya was asked if there are instances of resistance to the authoritarianism embodied by the narrator's father, which she answered in the affirmative, supporting her response with many cases from the novel. Solanki, in response to how a 'proletarian novel' can be defined, underlined that it is characterised by the presentation of popular resistance against an authoritarian regime and the Marxist bent of the work, as in this case, in its rejection of the nexus of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. To sum up, both papers highlighted how local elites continue to perpetuate colonial power structures and values to consolidate power in the two novels. In their critique of the inherent logic of capitalism, the presenters brought out how it failed the aspirations of postcolonial societies. The two papers are thus remarkable contributions, not just when considered within the ambit of the conference but also beyond it, at a time when decoloniality and decolonisation are being widely discussed and debated in academia.

