



Research Article

Controversy as Currency: An Investigation into the Economy and Politics of Literary Prizes

Aditya Ghosh  

Assistant Professor, ICAFI University Tripura.

Abstract:

Literary prizes, while providing legitimacy of artistic excellence to authors, are delicately poised in modern prize culture. They must maintain a balance between the artistic merit of literature and the health of the economic capital of the publishing industry and sponsors. This paper meticulously examines the myriad proliferation of literary prizes and the convergence of its intricacies— the process of nomination and selection, sponsorships, promotion, media coverage of the award ceremony, celebratory nature of the occasion, the climactic drama of acceptance speech, and controversy— to characterize the centrality of economic force at play. It reflects the dependency of art form's flourishing and sustenance on the logic of the economic marketplace. Through a close analysis of the controversial selection of certain authors and particular books, the paper looks at the epiphenomena of prestigious literary prizes to demonstrate a classic working of the neoliberal market outcome of controversy as publicity/currency, which not only brings about manufacturing of aura for controversial writers as celebrities but simultaneously radiates its effect on the demand value of their literary products and investing participants. It concludes that centrifugal dissemination and consumption of mediatised controversy events across national and international borders generates a centripetal concentration of socio-economic capital for writers, publishers and sponsors.

Keywords: Publicity, politics, public, controversy, economy, literary prize

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Funding: No funding received.

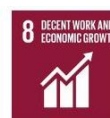
Article History: Received: 29 February 2024. Revised: 20 June 2024. Accepted: 21 June 2024. First published: 23 June 2024.

Copyright: © 2024 by the *author/s*.

License: License Aesthetix Media Services, India. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Published by: [Aesthetix Media Services, India](#)

Citation: Ghosh, A. (2024). Controversy as Currency: An Investigation into the Economy and Politics of Literary Prizes. *Rupkatha Journal* 16:2. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v16n2.25g>



1. Introduction:

In September 2015, Uday Prakash, a Hindi poet in India, returned the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award, which he won, as a form of protest against the Indian government for its failure to address pressing issues of rising religious intolerance, attack on civil society including murders of social activists, and suppression of freedom of expression. Subsequently, 26 awardees, which included widely recognized Nayantara Sehgal and Keki Daruwala, followed suit in solidarity with the *Award wapsi* (returning of award) movement and returned their award. Their stance was surprising because the institution of Sahitya Akademi did not have any role in the issues on which they protested nor did it have any power or authority to change the ground situation in India on this matter. But Sahitya Akademi was dragged into this turmoil and scandalized in order to attract widespread public attention and visibility in the media. What is noteworthy here is that in India, a dozen literary prizes exist, but only Sahitya Akademi recipients decided to return the award as a form of protest. Since Sahitya Akademi is the most prestigious and premier prize institute in India, it possesses the power to attract the wider public's attention, which other literary prizes do not have, except maybe Jnanpith. So, the literary prestige and symbolic value of Sahitya Akademi became a deciding factor for its entanglement in this controversy. Although it cannot be proved with certainty that the protest brought about any changes in society, it certainly brought a few recipients of vernacular languages into the limelight. Their symbolic value was increased, visibility widened, and demand for their books in the market amplified. So, this controversy brought them cultural and economic currency in the long run.

The above anecdote from the Indian literary sphere is not an isolated case. In fact, as the paper will demonstrate, it reflects a classic working of the neoliberal market outcome of the controversy as publicity/currency, which not only brings about the manufacturing of aura for controversial writers as celebrities but simultaneously increases the demand value of their literary products and the capital growth for the associated publishing enterprise of the products. The rejection of literary awards, in this case, constructs networks of affective economies constituted from media-induced public perception around the spectacle of the rejecting persona and the immediate and potential consumers of literary products. The centrifugal dissemination and consumption of this mediated event of controversy across national and international borders generates a centripetal concentration of socio-economic capital for writers regarding a revised measure of prestige and value of their work. Whether or not such events succeed as expository mechanisms for pressing reform and retrospection on the condemnations charged against the problematics of founding apparatus via the return or rejection of literary awards, it certainly corroborates to a payoff point where market forces, in such monumentalities of subversion, locate avenues of co-opting the subverting event in the repackaging of the literary products associated with dissenting writers and create broader inroads into hitherto untrailed market geographies. The paper looks into the epiphenomena of prestigious literary prizes with a special focus on the Nobel and the Booker and the ensuing ripple effects brought about by the controversial selection of certain authors and particular books.

2. Culturescapes of Literary Prizes and the working of prestige economy:

The cultural universe is submerged in the ocean of prizes as “there are more cultural awards than our collective cultural achievements” (English, 2005, p. 17). Literary prizes account for a major chunk of these cultural prizes, and hardly a fortnight passes by without the celebration of any literary prize in any part of the world. Only in Europe “over six hundred literary prizes exist” (Squires, 2004, p. 39) today. Till a few years ago, in India, apart from the prestigious Sahitya Akademi and Jnanpith, The Crossword Book Award, The Hindu Literary Prize, and the DSC prize had a significant presence. But in the last 3-4 years, a number of new literary prizes- JCB Prize, NIF Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Book Prize, and TATA Literature Live Award are a few among them- have been introduced. The mushrooming of literary prizes the world over has spawned numerous running jokes about prize recipients and the system of prize ceremonies. Gore Vidal once amusingly said that there are “more prizes than writers” in the United States, while Australian poet Peter Porter jokingly took a jibe saying “there is hardly any writer in Sydney who has not won one”; a British writer once narrated a hilarious anecdote that he attended a literary function and found out that he was “one of only two fiction writers present never to have won a literary award” (English, 2005, pp. 17-18). The whole circus around literary prizes takes our mind to Alice’s Wonderland, in which Dodo exclaims after the “caucus race” that “*everybody* has won, and *all* must have prizes” (Carroll, 1994). Although countless awards have been in existence, only a few can claim to have achieved immense prestige and, therefore, are internationally well-known. There are many reasons why only a few, such as the Nobel Prize, Booker Prize, Pulitzer Prize, and Sahitya Akademi, have reached the status of celebrity and garnered immense symbolic value; one reason among them is the controversy which gives huge publicity and media visibility.

Cultural prizes have “control over the cultural economy, over the distribution of esteem and reward on a particular cultural field over what may be recognized as worthy of special notice” (English, 2005, p. 51). Since “consecration has been a function of cultural awards”, literary prizes provide legitimacy to the excellence of the author and canonize the book by “honouring outstanding works of literature” (Driscoll, 2014, pp. 119-120). Pierre Bourdieu in *The Field of Cultural Production* emphasises that literary prizes have the power to increase cultural prestige of the recipient author (Squires, 2004, p. 39). This cultural capital does not always equate to economic capital, but it helps to accumulate economic capital in the subsequent periods of the author’s life. The prize culture and book industry are “realms of marketing and promotion, in which meaning proliferates in the promotional circuit and value is seen to be constructed” (Squires, 2004, p. 39) through visibility and presence in the public imagination. Literary prize culture has permeated into commercial aspects of the global literary marketplace and spawned an extensive international debate about the “popularity, readability, and literariness” (Squires, 2013, p. 301) of books that are awarded. The myriad proliferation of literary prizes and the convergence of its specificities- the process of nomination and selection, sponsorships, promotion, media coverage of the award ceremony, celebratory nature of the occasion, climactic drama of acceptance speech, and controversy- characterize the centrality of economic force at play, and reflects the dependency of art form’s flourish and sustenance on the logic of economic marketplace. Therefore, material conditions of the success of the book industry and the acquired prestige of literary prizes “are not a celebration but a contamination of the most precious aspects of art” (English, 2005, p. 3).

There is an ambiguity at the very heart of the literary prize culture. Prizes are awarded as a token of gift to honour the author's artistic excellence. The recipient happily receives the economic award that comes along with the prize irrespective of its value (most of the canonized prizes offer money the value of which does not correspond to the humongous prestige of prizes). There is no scope for negotiation as it is not a commercial transaction, and economic aspects of purchase or payment are not involved in awarding a prize. Awarding a prize is purely a symbolic gesture, and the souvenir or the physical gift which comes along with it is what Derrida calls a "residue...[or] remainder that no one knows what to do with it" (Derrida, 1992, p. 76). The symbolic gesture of the prize brings into discussion certain terms such as honour, endowment, and prestige, which are not markers of economic capital yet; these terms mainstream the author and give momentum to his economic health by increasing the distribution of the book for which the award is given as well as future publications. The prize becomes a sales tag for all the author's future works and is used as para-text on the book's cover, such as Booker Prize-winning author, Nobel Prize-winner, or Pulitzer Prize-winner.

Literary prizes acquire the prestige and power of legitimation through a constructed value and belief system. This authority to influence and power of taste-making is "established by publishers, critics, booksellers and authors who, through their actions, express a belief" (Dane, 2020, p. 123) on a concerned literary prize. "Prizes are one of the chief mechanisms by which the literary field establishes notions of literary value" (Stinson, 2016, p. 140), and the collective constructed belief and endowed cultural value institutionalize literary prizes through "regularity of events- such as the annual awarding of a prize" (Dane, 124). Wouter de Nooy expresses the same sentiment and affirms that "the prestige of a prize is equivalent to the importance that members of the literary field attach to it" (1998, p. 535).

This condensation process is ambivalent as the author is consecrated and desecrated by winning the award. Consecratory power legitimizes artistic superiority, canonizes the book, inflates the prestige and elevates the status of the author. On the other hand, it drags the author's attention to the changing material conditions of his life; his economic health improves as the sale of books increases and contractual currency inflates, he turns into a darling of media and journalistic coverage and becomes an object of constant scrutiny in the academia. This condensation converges the cultural and the economic capital and weaves together the sanctity of art and the profanity of material entanglement. The symbolic marker of high prestige influences the psychology of readers and makes it difficult for them to judge the true value of artistic merit. Sartre refused to accept The Nobel prize precisely because of this reason, and he explained in a letter to the Swedish press that the honour of the prize may "expose his readers to a pressure" he did not "consider desirable". He further added, "If I sign myself Jean-Paul Sartre, it is not the same thing as if I sign myself *Jean-Paul Sartre, Nobel Prizewinner*" (Sartre, 1964). Historically, the winners of prestigious prizes become somewhat ineffective after they receive the award. Hemingway thought writers' career comes to an end after winning the Nobel whereas Eliot declared, "The Nobel is a ticket to one's funeral. No one has ever done anything after he got it" (Meyers, 2007, p. 221). V. S. Naipaul produced his best works long before he won the Nobel Prize in 2001 and produced nothing spectacular after he won it, as is the case with Albert Camus. As Salman Rushdie kept on amassing international awards, and Booker repeatedly crowned him, his productivity went downhill; after the phenomenal success of *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy was honoured

with almost every literary prize that was available on earth, and her next fiction appeared after almost 20 years.

3. Existing scholarship on Literary Prize culture:

In an age of televised media, social media, blogs and websites, when hardly a week goes by without an event or any cultural prize ceremony, it can be said with certainty that not much scholarly work has been devoted to cultural prizes. It prompted James English to declare that “there is no form of cultural capital so ubiquitous, so powerful, so widely talked about, and yet so little explored by scholars as the cultural prize” (2002, p. 109). The literary field is recognized by prestigious prizes like Nobel, Booker, Prix Goncourt, Strega, Pulitzer, and Sahitya Akademi, but extensive scholarship into the role of prizes in expanding artistic merit and increasing economic capital could be counted on fingers. James English (2005) devotes his book *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards and the Circulation of Cultural Value* to trace the history and development of cultural prizes over the centuries. He goes back all the way to the times of “Greek drama and art competitions in the sixth-century b. c., to the classical and medieval competitions in architecture, and to the musical-composition prizes, university essay prizes, and other sorts of cultural awards” which were prevalent during the early Renaissance, and followed the persistent growth of the system of awarding till the nineteenth century through prestigious academies and professional associations, and to the spectacular rise and “wild proliferations” of innumerable cultural prizes in the last hundred years (2005, p. 1-2). Graham Huggan (2001), in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, situates the prize culture in postcolonial paraphernalia and analyses the infusion of value into poverty-stricken, corruption-prone, politically enmeshed third-world marginal societies. It explores the way the literary prize is used as an apparatus to create broader inroads into hitherto untrailed market geographies by channelling an exoticist discourse in postcolonial studies. Richard Todd (1996), in his book *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, carefully explains how literary culture has championed the limelight of media and helped to flourish the economy of the book trade. He particularly focuses on the Booker and explains the logic of the proliferation of corporate book chains in Britain and the role of prize culture in the convergence of agents of the culture industry (authors, publishers, agents, reviewers, distributors) in making the book culture an economically profitable business. Claire Squires (2004) investigates the role prizes play in the intricate intertwinement of cultural and economic capital. She takes up the region of Europe for discussion and analyses the material conditions of the book industry, the reception of prize-winning authors and its impact on the distribution of their books.

A study of existing scholarship reveals that the role of controversy in Literary Prize culture has not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, this research paper takes up this research gap as its primary objective and makes a critical investigation to unravel the politics that uses controversy as a marketing strategy to invite media attention and maximize the exposure of sponsors, books and authors for economic benefit in the long run.

4. Controversial beginning of the Nobel's journey:

Although there has been an innumerable controversy in the history of cultural prizes, the reasons for controversies could be claimed to be just a few, and these controversies generally “derive from the scandalous fact of the prizes’ very existence, their claim to a legitimate and even premier place on the fields of culture” (English, 2005, p. 190). Often sponsors, winners or administrators become the subject of journalistic coverage, but most intense and scandalous controversies never spring out from these minor structural imperfections. It arises from the very root of its objective which is to provide legitimacy to artistic merit, and that is why “the most common and generic scandals concern the judges, specifically the judges’ dubious aesthetic dispositions, as betrayed by their meagre credentials, their risible lack of habitus, or their glaring errors of judgment” (English, 2005, p. 190). Since literary prizes set out to honour the best books or authors based on the criteria placed by the administrators, the omission often becomes contentious and creates controversy. The list of exclusions, which includes Leo Tolstoy, James Joyce, Jorge Luis Borges, Henry James, Italo Calvino, and Franz Kafka, has haunted the Academy of Nobel Prizes for the best part of their history. On the very first year of its inception, in 1901, the Nobel Prize found itself in the mire of controversy by presenting the award to comparatively unknown French writer Sully Prudhomme instead of Leo Tolstoy. The controversy concerted around the merit of the judges and their inability to distinguish an extraordinary artist from a bad one whose work “appears pornographic, morally corrupt, politically unpalatable, or simply worthless according to prevailing standards of evaluation” (English, 2005, p. 191). The academy’s objective is to honour illustrious personalities for providing “the greatest benefit on mankind” by taking literature “in an ideal direction” (Wallin et al., 2001, p. 138). Many artists, critics and literary personalities felt the snubbing of Tolstoy was a direct contradiction to the ideal the academy was representing, and vehement criticism flowed towards the Nobel organization in a form of protest by them. Wide circulation of journalistic coverage and critics’ reviews associated with the questionable merit of the panel of judges who were accused of having an intention of promoting garbage literature by underestimating a true artist of the highest calibre. This controversy garnered widespread publicity for the organization by bringing it to the public sphere, and it “seized the collective imagination with sufficient force” (English, 2005, p. 28) to strengthen its roots. Journalists and critics kept the controversy alive for quite some time as it boosted the economy of magazines, newspapers and tabloids. The publicity generated by this controversy paved the way for subsequent notable prizes to take birth within a short span of time, as “within just three years of the first Nobel ceremony in Stockholm, both the Goncourt and Femina literary prizes had been founded in France, and Joseph Pulitzer had declared his intention to launch, in emulation of Alfred Nobel, a series of annual literature and journalism prizes in America” (English, 2005, pp. 28-29).

5. The sword of Eurocentrism and gender inequality hangs over the Nobel Prize:

For a very long time, the Nobel Prize for literature has been accused of being biased toward Scandinavian writers and criticised for its failure to recognize literature emerging from Africa, South Asia, and certain eastern European and South American countries. This issue finds its place in Burton Feldman’s book, where he states, “as the list of laureates makes clear, the Nobel Prize in literature is still far from being the global award it claims to be. Its prizes have repeatedly gone to

writing in a few major European languages, primarily English, French, German, Spanish" (2000, p. 59). Only 9 countries (France, USA, UK, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Spain, Italy, Ireland) account 80 Nobel laureates out of 116 till 2019, and only 5 languages (English, French, German, Spanish and Swedish) have amassed 75 Nobel prizes in which English language alone dominates with 29. Academy's first chairman Carl Wirsén had been accused of having personal bias towards some of the greatest writers of his time. According to him, Tolstoy was "narrow-minded hostility for all forms of civilization," and against Hardy, he professed that "Hardy's deep pessimism and inexorable fatalism were not to be reconciled to the spirit of the Nobel Prize" (Meyers, 2007, p. 216). The predominance of a certain region in the list of winners and the Academy's inability to recognize and appreciate literature coming from minority languages from all over the world makes it clear that even though "the Nobel Prize for science and peace are truly international awards, the prize for literature is not" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 50).

Moreover, it became a subject of controversy for disproportionate representation of gender as well. In the long history of Nobel prizes, only 15 laureates have been women till now, and what is more glaring is only 6 women were honoured in the history of 90 years before Nadine Gordimer won in 1991. This issue has not gone unnoticed and it garnered much media attention and discussion. Richard Jewell addressed it with scathing criticism:

Feminist critics earlier in the century may have been somewhat mollified by the fact that from 1926 through 1945, four of fifteen winners were women. Yet since World War Two until recently, when Nadine Gordimer was chosen, during a 45-year period, only one woman, a German Swede (Nelly Sachs) was selected. So bad is this record that it begs the question of culture and 'great literature' from a gender perspective... (2000, p. 107)

After much criticism of Eurocentrism and gender inequality, the academy has tried to "compensate for its shortcomings and to redress the accusations that the prize is patriarchal and Eurocentric" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 51) in the last few decades.

6. Uproar on Wole Soyinka's selection:

The Nobel Prize tried to ward off the controversy of being Eurocentric by awarding the prize to a host of non-European writers from the mid-eighties. Wole Soyinka was the first writer from Africa to win it in 1986, and in subsequent decades, the list of Nobel laureates included the illustrious names of Naguib Mahfouz (1988), Nadine Gordimer (1991), Derek Walcott (1992), Toni Morrison (1993), Kenzaburo Oe (1994), Gao Xingjian (2000), V. S. Naipal (2001), J. M. Coetzee (2003), Orhan Pamuk (2006), Doris Lessing (2007), Mo Yan (2012), Alice Munro (2013) and Kazuo Ishiguro (2017).

The 1980s was the period, neoliberalism took off, leaving behind the old economic model of Keynesian consensus, and with a particular emphasis on globalization, privatization and free trade diluted national barriers. Keeping pace with the late-capitalist market, the Booker had already ventured out to forge the untapped market of Third World countries by awarding Salman Rushdie in 1981, and it was the Nobel's turn to follow the footprint of market economy. To honour writers from the margin with the Nobel Prize was a conscious effort to establish its authority and legitimacy in those parts of the world. The promotion of the Nobel Academy in third-world

postcolonial countries, where a new first-generation readership emerged, helped to sell award-winning books in greater numbers and maximize profit.

Soyinka was already a famous literary personality for his extensive literary works comprising of novels, essays and poems. But he attracted a lot of media attention for his vehement opposition and fierce criticism of his own government when Nigeria was deeply embroiled in civil war. He was charged with aligning with Biafran rebels and put behind bars for 22 months as a political prisoner for going against the government. He particularly made headlines in Sweden as he was a political dissident over there. Wide international publicity both as a writer and a political activist, and the location of his political asylum certainly made him a prime contender as the Nobel Academy also had wide reach to gain and legitimacy to establish. The Nobel Academy has a long history of awarding writers who had different political ideologies and a hostile relationship with the governments of their own countries. Russian writers Boris Pasternak (1958), Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn (1970) and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, who won in 1991, are some of the examples which substantiate this claim.

In the late 70s and early 80s, when the economy was liberalized, and public sectors started becoming privatized, there were widespread union protests, and the anti-establishment mood ran high in Europe, particularly in Britain. Honouring the writers from the margin, who rebelled against their governments, was an orchestrated plan to highlight the precarious and deplorable situation of foreign countries, and "even the poorest of Britain were reminded that however bad their lives were, others were in the worst state of godlessness" (Sharp, 2009, p. 50-51). A political undercurrent of the dichotomy of centre/margin and civilized/barbaric society was pitched in. Having mainstreamed the writers from the margin, the Nobel Academy fulfilled two purposes at once. On the one hand, it presented a barbaric and uncivilized margin which is ravaged with "violence, poverty and penury", and on the other hand, this same margin is "romanticized, exoticized, and so presented to the Western world, with its primitivism" (Jaidka, 2000, pp. 16-17).

7. Nobel's Naipal controversy:

Even the staunchest critics of V. S Naipal would not deny his artistic merit and question his literary achievements, but the timing of awarding him the Nobel prize surprised many and sparked a huge controversy. His travelogue *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples*, which he wrote while travelling through four non-Arab Muslim countries, Pakistan, Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia, is highly significant to understanding the controversy around the time of his Nobel inclusion. He starts the prologue of the book by stating, "This is a book of people. It is not a book of opinion", but later in the prologue, he contradicts this statement and tries to come to the conclusion of Islamic fundamentalism. He writes:

Islam is in its origins an Arab religion. Everyone not an Arab who is a Muslim is a convert. Islam is not simply a matter of conscience or private belief. It makes imperial demands. A convert's worldview alters. His holy places are in Arab lands; his sacred language is Arabic. His idea of history alters. He rejects his own; he becomes, whether he likes it or not, a part of the Arab story. The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance

for societies is immense, and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved. (Naipal, 1998)

Naipal's name was doing the rounds for a few years in the corridors of the academy, but they decided to award him in 2001, a few days after the 9/11 attack. This was the time when Islamophobia was running high in the West. USA troops landed in Afghanistan, and the world was on the verge of a big catastrophe. *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *In a Free State* (1971) have been Naipal's best of literary productions which came long before he was awarded the prize, and the travelogue *Beyond Belief*, which was charged with Islamophobia, was published in 1998 which was still a fresh memory when the attack on Twin Towers was carried out. The Nobel Academy commercialized the sentiments of common people, magnified the prevalent islamophobia at the time and meticulously courted a controversy which provided great mileage to the already established and esteemed Nobel organization. Naipal's symbolic value was increased further by constantly displaying the matter in the media, his legacy was strengthened, and the sale of his books invigorated. Naipal was condemned for spreading anti-Islamic sentiment in the West by the media in the East. The academy was criticised for neglecting Naipal's oeuvre of literary excellence at the expense of commodifying a sensationalized book for media publicity. Patrick French declares;

At this point in British history, when the sensational and immediate matter above all else and fame was becoming more important than the achievements that might give rise to fame, Naipal's half century of work as a writer seemed less significant than his reputation for causing offence. (2008, p. xi)

This travelogue of Naipal along with *Among the Believers* (1981) became the subject of discussion suddenly worldwide and many articles were published in various newspapers and magazines. Naipal's frequent flirtations with controversy helped him to gain wide publicity which in turn boosted the sale of his books and reached him to wider audiences.

8. Role of controversy in Booker's breakthrough:

When the Booker Prize was launched in 1968, the press release of the Publishers Association read "although the sum of £5,000 will be a generous reward to the winning author, we hope that his real success will be a significant interest in the sales of his book and that this will...help to narrow the all too frequent gap between artistic and commercial success" (Squires, 2013, p. 296). It is quite evident from the press release and the presence of a multinational corporation behind the launch of the prize that the commercial element is given significant importance. Initially, the prize did not capture much attention until a huge controversy erupted when Malcolm Muggeridge, who was chairing the panel of judges, decided to resign in 1971. He accused the organization of selecting too many morally corrupt, salacious and pornographic books for consideration. Martyn Goff, the chief administrator of the organization, leaked the reason for the resignation to the press. This turned into a massive controversy, and Booker received constant international media coverage with frontline headlines. *The Sun* monitored the controversy closely and published articles with controversial headlines; "Muggeridge Quits in 'Porn' Row", "St Mugg Quits in Porn Storm" (Squires, 2013, p. 297).

The very concept of Booker's patronage of postcolonial writing is ironic and controversial. Booker McConnell is a multinational corporation which has its roots in the early nineteenth century in the British colony Demerara, which was later renamed Guyana. The company made its fortune by providing distributional service to colonial sugar plantations in the Caribbean. The company, which has a black history, became a billion-dollar company with the sweat and blood of exploited and oppressed people in the British colonies, ironically, the very same company took an entrepreneurial decision to promote and encourage writers who are writing back to the empire. This dark history of Booker has come back to haunt them as a couple of Booker winners created stirs with their acceptance speeches. John Berger, who won the prestigious prize in 1972 for his experimental novel *G*, created a huge controversy with his decision to donate a huge sum of money to the militant Black Panther movement and mentioned resoundingly when he received the prize that "they resist, both as black people and workers, the further exploitations of the oppressed; and because they have links with the struggle in Guyana, the seat of Booker McConnell's wealth- the struggle whose aim is to appropriate all such enterprises", and the very next year Booker winner J. G. Farrell amusingly reminded the Booker it's unfortunate history with a note that "every year the Booker brothers see their prize wash up a monster more horrible than the last" (Huggan, 1994, p. 25). These controversies brought huge publicity to The Booker, and within 5 years of its inception, it reached a wider international audience. Journalistic coverage of its controversies increased Booker's symbolic value and brought it international recognition and wider attention.

9. Booker and Rushdie: Brothers in controversies:

The Booker Prize and Salman Rushdie have never shied away from creating controversies; in fact, they have complemented each other in courting controversies and putting each other in the limelight. Salman Rushdie was brought into the limelight out of obscurity and made into an instant celebrity when *Midnight's Children* was awarded the Booker Prize. Booker particularly influenced the postcolonial field as it recognized authors from postcolonial countries. Salman Rushdie's winner opened the Indian market for exploration to the publishing industries, and many diaspora writers were encouraged to trade Indian exotica with Western metropolitan audiences. Anthony Appiah explains the condition of postcoloniality as a "comprador intelligentsia" which comprises "of a relatively small, Western style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (Huggan, 1994, p. 24).

Publishing houses promoted diasporic writers heavily and established them as cultural gatekeepers of India. These writers are settled in the West and do not have any touch with the ground realities of India, but their imaginative narration of India was pushed in the media as authentic in the 80s and 90s. Although all publishers approach differently and with individual ideologies, they all know that "exoticism sells", and "Indian writing offers a window onto a different, exciting world. This world produces wonder: it rejuvenates the sensibilities of a readership tired of provincial navel-gazing; tired also of literature that reflects the realities of a society from which they badly need a release" (Huggan, 1994, p. 26). Having decoded the zeitgeist of the international marketplace the writers were ready to trade exotic local Oriental colour which included "poverty, displacement and corruption" (Dwivedi, 2014, p. 104). This commodity fetish of

Oriental exotica of the global marketplace made the cultural industry privilege Western-style, Western-trained diasporic Indian writers. This sparked a debate which centred around the inauthenticity of representation, and criticism flowed towards diasporic writers for deepening the roots of stereotypes about India and pushing India further to the margin. In an atmosphere of already persisting criticism of inauthenticity charged against Indian postcolonial writers, Salman Rushdie created an uproar with a controversial comment in his article in *The New Yorker* about vast Indian literature existing in vernacular languages. His statement eerily resembled the notorious "Minute Upon Indian Education" which was placed in the British parliament by Thomas Macaulay. Rushdie wrote:

The prose writing – both fiction and nonfiction – created in this period [the 50 years of independence] by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen "recognized" languages of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages,' during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, "Indo-Anglian" literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books. The True Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind. (Nayar, 2014, p. 46)

This highly provoking and controversial comment shot up the intensity of the authenticity debate as India's English daily, *The Hindu*, pushed the issue into the limelight immediately. Within a few weeks, a few more articles which dealt with the authenticity debate appeared by eminent literary personalities such as Vikram Chandra and Rajeswari Sundar Rajan in the *Boston Review* and *The Hindu* (Nayar, 2014). Rushdie was already a renowned personality in the international market owing to the Booker winner in 1981 and the Islamic fatwa against him after the publication of *Satanic Verses* (1988), but this controversy gave him wider media publicity and journalistic coverage and made him a celebrity (high visibility in the media and much discussed).

In 1981, The Booker promoted Rushdie, made him a literary star, and legitimized his artistic merit by recognizing his literary talent, but now, it was Booker's turn to take leverage out of Rushdie's celebrity and promote themselves in emerging economic marketplaces. Booker inducted *Midnight's Children* twice more, in 1993 and in 2008, with Booker of Bookers and the Best of Booker. Mark O'Connell criticized Booker's decision to award the same book over and over again saying;

... what the hell was so great about Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* that they had to give it not just the Booker itself in 1981, but also something called The Booker of Bookers in 1993, and then something else called The Best of the Booker in 2008? (Dwivedi, 2014, p. 115)

It is clearly evident that Booker did not honour him for the artistic merit of the book for the second time, but they wanted to create a phenomenon of Rushdie and increase the social and symbolic value of Booker by aligning with the monster phenomenon that they were creating. In 1993, Booker wanted to continue forging the emerging postcolonial markets to trade cultural commodities in exotic third-world locales. But, by the time it honoured him again in 2008, twenty-first century India was not a market only for exotic fetish anymore. India as a country moved forward, was more confident and had created its own identity with its achievements in various

sectors of society, and Indian writing in English had become “celebrities for its connections, lineages, achievements and attributions” (Nayar, 2014, p. 38). Therefore, the agents of culture industries (authors, publishers, distributors, agents, reviewers) consciously wanted to set up their branches expand business empires, and capture the imagination of the new globalized emergent readers in the Indian subcontinent. The Booker promoted itself heavily by associating with the aura and phenomenon of Salman Rushdie and increased the symbolic value of Booker's brand. This huge promotion boosted the distribution of Rushdie's book with renewed energy and established the canonicity of both Rushdie and the Booker further.

10. Booker's Hulme hoopla:

Keri Hulme won the Booker in 1985 for her *The Bone People*, and in the subsequent period, it became a controversial issue of racial inauthenticity, which was aggressively played in the media by the British press. The scandal was sparked, and the issue of racial inauthenticity was raised because of the receiving of the award by a group of singing Maori tribeswomen. She was criticised for being an opportunist and giving it a racial colour, whereas she herself was “Anglophone and only one-eighth Maori blood, but most importantly, she was raised and educated as a white anglophone in New Zealand” (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 60). Having awarded Hulme, The Booker caught everyone off-guard because *The Bone People* made little ripple after its publication and made meagre money from its sale. It also did not manage to capture great reviews, as only a few critics reviewed the book. The book does not directly and precisely deal with the Maori tribes either. However, a touch of Maori culture and the drama of receiving the award gave the British press ample opportunity to seize the moment.

But, the timing of the book and the controversy is best understood when it is analysed keeping the social history and political situation of the US in mind. In the 1980s, the political situation in America was volatile because racial and cultural wars in civil society were at their peak. By creating a provocative controversy around racial inauthenticity, it attracted the attention of the US, which already was moving towards multiculturalism by adopting an inclusive strategy in every aspect of society. Booker had already made inroads in Third World postcolonial countries through the commodification of cultural margins and exotic fetishism around the same time. Booker wanted to penetrate the US economic market as well and challenge the authority of Pulitzer, but its own criteria of publications only from commonwealth countries and Ireland became a hindrance for it. The orchestrated controversy hijacked the racial movements in the USA and commodified Hulme's book. Out of this hullabaloo, The Booker got a huge promotion in the USA, its symbolic value went upwards, the base of The Booker was entrenched further, and the book's prestige was consecrated. The controversy turned Hulme into a celebrity overnight. The book made a huge profit in the market, and its prestige was consecrated, making it a canon and earning it a place in the world literature and postcolonial syllabi worldwide.

11. Conclusion:

Literary prizes provide legitimacy of artistic excellence to authors as well as books, but with the association of various sponsors in modern prize culture, the position of prizes is delicately poised

to maintain a balance between the artistic merit of literature and the health of the economic capital of the publishing industry and sponsors. The eruption of controversies in prestigious prizes gathers journalistic capital, which acts as a mediator or a bridging gap between cultural and commercial aspects because media publicity takes it to the wider public sphere, which, in turn, boosts the sale of books. In the late-capitalist globalized world, the universe is well connected through television and the internet. Controversy broadens international exposure, and it not only helps the institution of the Literary Prize to stay in public visibility but also enhances the symbolic value of prize-winners and increases the consumption and production of their books. The events of the literary prizes have become glamorous spectacles in which celebrity walks and stardom are created. The celebration environment includes champagne dinner, constant media glare, and swanky hotels or convention centres. This glitzy affair craves a huge promotional push to attract the public's attention to make it a blockbuster hit, and what is more effective than controversy to send a shockwave in the media throughout the world? Thus, Controversy has become an annual ritual in every prize-giving ceremony, and it is used as a marketing tool as part of the promotional strategy of the award ceremony. Controversy brings currency for every stakeholder of a literary prize: the sponsors, the publishing industry and the author.

References:

- Agencies and Staff. (2001, Oct 11). VS Naipaul wins 2001 Nobel Prize. *The Guardian*.
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/oct/11/nobelprize.awardsandprizes>
- Carroll, L. (1994). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Project Gutenberg.
- Chinweizu, Jemie, O., Madubuike, I., (Eds). (1983). *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature. Volume I: African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics*. Howard University Press.
- Dane, A. (2020). Eligibility, Access and the Laws of Literary Prizes. *Australian Humanities Review*, 66 (May), pp. 122-136.
- De Nooy, W. (1998). Gentlemen of the Jury... The Features of Experts Awarding Literary Prizes. *Poetics*, pp. 17, 531–535.
- Derrida, J. (1992). *Given Time, I: Counterfeit Money*. University of Chicago Press.
- Driscoll, B. (2014). *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dwivedi, O. P. (2014). Indian Writing in English: Commodification and Re-Orientalism. In Lisa Lau & Om Prakash Dwivedi (Eds.), *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- English, J. (2002). Winning the Culture Game: Prizes. Awards. and the Rules of Art. *New Literary History*, 33(1), pp. 109–135.
- English, J. (2005). *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Harvard University Press.
- Feldman, B. (2000). *The Nobel Prize: A History of Genius, Controversy, and Prestige*. Arcade Publishing.
- French, P. (2008). *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul*. Picador.
- Huggan, G. (1994). The Postcolonial Exotic. *Transition*, pp. 64, 22–29.

- Huggan, G. (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge.
- Hulme, K. (2010). *The Bone People*. Penguin Books, [1985].
- Jaidka, M. (2000). The writer as Trishanku: Indian writing in a foreign space. In Somdatta Mandal (Ed.), *The Diasporic Imagination: Asian American Writing*, Prestige Books, pp. 9–30.
- Jameson, F. (1986). Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism. *Social Text*, pp. 15, pp. 65–88.
- Jewell, R. (2000). The Nobel Prize: History and Canonicity. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 33(1), 97–113.
- Meyers, J. (2007). The Literary Politics of the Nobel Prize. *The Antioch Review*, 65(2), pp. 214–223.
- Naipaul, V.S. (1961). *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Vintage Books.
- Naipaul, V.S. (1971). *In a Free State*. Penguin Books.
- Naipaul, V.S. (1981). *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*. Picador.
- Naipaul, V.S. (1998). *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*. Picador.
- Nayar, P.K. (2014). Indian Writing in English as Celebrity. In Om Prakash Dwivedi and Lisa Lau (Eds.), *Indian Writing in English and the Global Literary Market*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ponzanesi, S. (2014). *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. Flamingo.
- Rushdie, S. (1981). *Midnight's Children*. Jonathan Cape.
- ... (1988). *The Satanic Verses*. Viking Press.
- ... (1991). *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Granta.
- Sartre, J. P. (1964, December 17). Sartre on the Nobel Prize. Translated by Howard, R., *The New York Review of Books*.
- <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1964/12/17/sartre-on-the-nobel-prize/>
- Sharp, J. P. (2009). *Geographies of Postcolonialism*. SAGE.
- Squires, C. (2004). A Common Ground? Book Prize Culture in Europe. *Javnost-The Public*, 11(4), pp. 37–47.
- Squires, C. (2013). Literary prizes and Awards. In Harper, G. Harper (Ed.), *A Companion to Creative Writing*, John Wiley & Sons, pp. 291–303.
- Stinson, E. (2016). Small Publishers and the Miles Franklin Award. In A. Mannion & E. Stinson (Eds.), *The Return of Print*, Monash University Publishing, pp. 137–148.
- Todd, R. (1996). *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*. Bloomsbury.
- Wallin, L. A. & Ringertz, N. (Eds.). (2001). *The Nobel Prize: The First 100 Years*. Imperial College Press.