



Skepticism as the Rudimentary Nature: A Postmodernist Approach to Muhammad Hafeez Khan's Novel *Adh Ahuray Lok: People with Lost Identities*

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: May 05, 2023

Revised: June 18, 2023

Accepted: June 18, 2023

Available Online: June 19, 2023

Keywords:

Postmodernism

Skepticism

Metanarrative

Intertextuality

Hyper-Reality

Historiographic Metafiction

Pastiche

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the novel *Adh Ahuray Lok* (People with Lost Identities) by Muhammad Hafeez Khan from the perspective of skeptical nature in postmodernism. A significant amount of postmodernist theory relies on maintaining a skeptical attitude. The projects of philosophical postmodernism and philosophical skepticism appear deeply aligned, as both focus on doubting existing metanarratives and assumptions. They seek to justify the assumptions inherent in our systems of rationality, meaning, and truth. Furthermore, they challenge the modernist notion that objective knowledge is attainable or that we can confidently assert progress. The researcher has selected five diverse postmodernist theorists and incorporated one concept from each theorist to strengthen the argument regarding postmodernism's skeptical nature. The study employs a qualitative content analysis method to analyse the text of the chosen novel. The researcher concludes that postmodernism is rooted in skepticism, as supported by the analysis of the selected text.

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1. Introduction

Muhammad Hafeez Khan is an award winning and most popular author of South Punjab, Pakistan (M. H. Khan, 2019). He is an outstanding literary critic, playwright, fiction writer and historian. He is among the pioneers of the Saraiki literary movement. While he writes in Urdu and English as well, he is largely known as a Saraiki writer as his works, in any language, revolve around themes of Saraiki people and their homeland. Muhammad Hafeez Khan's latest Saraiki novel is titled *Adh Adhuray Lok* (*People with Lost Identities*). It continues the tradition of postcolonial literature produced by various Afro-Asian writers of those countries that got freedom from European colonial powers. It is interesting to note that postcolonial literature was not just about opposing the narrative of the colonizers; it also interrogated the reliability and trustworthiness of those natives who shattered the aspirations and dreams of newly liberated people. The effects of deception and colonial inheritance were so profound that some cultures and nations continued suffering even after gaining independence. This colonial legacy was the same mindset and same kind of bureaucratic and administrative system. Khan's novel is also written in the perspective of liberation of India, and consequent upon that the emergence of Pakistan and the tragedy of millions people's migration from one country to another country.

After the independence, the people belonging to newly created state (Pakistan) had to witness continuous betrayals from its leaders and rulers. Different provinces, regions and princely states were merged and so called One Unit was formed in West Pakistan. This effort to establish a homogenous province negated the history, culture and identity of different cultural and linguistic factions. The author of *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) describes the One Unit as a colonial ploy under which linguistic, cultural, historical identities were usurped by the particular dominant

linguistic and cultural groups (Arif, 2020). The establishment of One Unit was a kind of domestic colonization. The Saraiki writers, motivated by the movements against One Unit, started writing to restore their cultural, linguistic and historical identity that had been trespassed and usurped by the powerful ethnic group. The people of Bahawalpur made struggle to regain their state as a province; they are still making efforts in this regard. The Saraiki literary and cultural movement emerged as a resistance against the dominant group in the mid-1980s.

The novel *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) by Muhammad Hafeez Khan is a story based on the facts. It is about the confused people of Ahmadpur, a town in Bahawalpur State. As a result of division of India, they are uncertain about their social, cultural and political future. The novel opens shortly after the partition of subcontinent and consequent upon that the formation of Pakistan. The central character of the novel is Fiaz, a resident of Ahmadpur. Fiaz is the pupil of a Hindu Physician (Hakeem) Ram Lal. Like other areas of newly established Pakistan, the Hindu community of Bahawalpur State is also uncertain and fearful about its future. After continuous threats and incidents of Hindus being attacked, Fiaz helps Hakim Ram Lal and his family evacuate from Bahawalpur to Hindustan. This incident disintegrates Fiaz as he loves Ram Lal's beautiful daughter Tulsi by heart and soul. Nawab of Bahawalpur decides to accede to Muslim Majority Dominion Pakistan. However, later on it was merged into West Pakistan with the formation of One Unit. As a result, natives are ignored and every business is captured by migrants. After the annulment of One Unit, instead of restoring the status of Bahawalpur as a province, it is merged into Punjab. The natives protest against this cruel move. There is a huge protest against this move. The police open fires at crowd and many people suffer death. Fiaz is one among those who die in this sad incident. There are a great numbers of casualties but only two are reported officially. The dead body of Fiaz along with other persons unreported is thrown into a long ditch near Derawar fort in Cholistan desert. His body falls on the skeleton of long awaited Tulsi. The target of this research is to analyze the novel *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) in postmodernist context. The primary focus of the study is to analyze the text within the framework of postmodernist selected concepts which mark it skeptical in nature.

2. Literature Review

Postmodernism evolved in mid-20th century as a non-acceptance of modernism and was then expanded across a number of disciplines. Postmodernists are skeptical of accounts which assert to be authentic for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and rather center on the relative truth of each individual. Postmodernism believes in independent or self-sufficient existence of every element. It believes in the idea of no absolute truth (Duignan, 2020). Postmodern thinkers consider knowledge and value systems as socially conditioned. They regard them the product of cultural, political or historical hierarchies or discourses. History is treated as a subjective outlook, differing in accordance with different authors and, therefore, there are "anti-narratives" in the postmodernist texts. In the context of Postmodern, center is absent. The importance of signified is less than that of signifier. Reader's involvement in a text is encouraged as a sole piece of writing contains various meanings. There is the amalgamation of fiction and reality, in other words hyper-reality. Intertextuality i.e. pieces of different texts exist in a text. In short, postmodernism mainly focuses upon "fragmentation, amalgamation of various genres, and text is taken as a positive attribute of language" (M. M. Khan & Akbar, 2020).

Postmodernist approach has been applied by various researchers to analyze various Pakistani novels written in different languages. M. M. Khan and Akbar (2020) investigate Hashim Nadeem's Urdu novel *Muqadas* (2013) in the perspective of postmodern elements pinpointed by different postmodern theorists. The research discloses that the novel contains various concepts of postmodernism such as intertextuality, metanarrative, faction, absurdity and fragmentation and alienation from emotions. Saleem, Hashmat, and Murtaza (2020) analyse famous Urdu writer Manto's fiction and regard it as historiographic metafiction which de-doxifies the depiction in Indo-Pak official narrative. The paper reaches at the conclusion that Manto's *Afsanas* have delineated the dedoxified history which rejects both Pakistani and Indian narratives. He has presented the historical picture with unbiased lens that exposes vast impacts that partition had on human beings regardless of their caste, creed and religion.

Awan and Ahmad (2019) analyse *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif in Lyotardian language games perspective. Through language games, the novel undermines the master narrative of science, nation, justice, faith and culture. The research discovers how language plays its role to communicate, interpret and understand the postmodern world as each

idea exists in signs or language forms. In terms of their performativity, the borders of Postcolonialism and Postmodernism can be found within each other in many ways. For example, one of the most observable conventions of postmodernism is that it never acknowledges the controlling and dominating position of super historical narratives. Postcolonial literature also gives big jerks to the power and authority of English Literature. So, like postmodern literature, it breaks the control of historically authoritative and powerful narrative of English Literature (Ahmad, 2022). The Saraiki novel *Adh Adhuray Lok (2019)* can also be categorized as postcolonial text because it contains all those characteristics, especially the curses and cruelties consequent upon partition. Hussain and Rind (2020) state that total number of novels published in Saraiki language is twenty-eight. As Urdu novel was greatly influenced by English novel, Saraiki novel is influenced by Urdu novel. Jalal (1992) writes in this perspective, "Saraiki likhariyan day samnay Urdu nawlan dy nmonay mojud hun" i.e. "Before Saraiki writers were the artifacts of Urdu novels" (p.79). Literature review reveals that several researches have been conducted on Pakistani novels written in different languages keeping in view the concepts of postmodernism. However, the primary focus of the present study is to analyze the novel *Adh Adhuray Lok (2019)* within the framework of postmodernist selected concepts of different postmodernist authors which mark it skeptical in nature.

3. Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative content analysis method to explore a Saraiki novel *Adh Adhuray Lok (2019)* written by Muhammad Hafeez Khan. Content analysis method is systematic research method to analyze and make inferences from the text.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study analyzes the selected text under the perspective of skeptical nature of postmodernism. The researcher has selected five diverse theorists of postmodernism and has taken one concept of each theorist to analyze the selected text and, therefore, to make argument strong apropos the skeptical nature of postmodernism. The theorists with their concepts are; Jean-Francois Lyotard's '*Metanarrative*', Julia Kristeva's '*intertextuality*', Baudrillard's '*hyper-reality*', Linda Hutcheon's '*historiographic metafiction*', and Jameson's '*pastiche*'. The primary goal of the researcher is to reach at the conclusion that postmodernism forms its basis from skepticism as it is proved by analyzing the selected text under selected concepts of diverse theorists.

5. Discussion and Findings

Postmodernism, emerged from Western secular conditions, contains these attributes; it accentuates relativism and pluralism, and repudiates any sure belief and fixed value; it clashes with essentialism, and regards human identity as socially constructed; it discards the notion that values are constructed by development realities and also rejects the indispensable effect of human deeds on human destiny. In short, postmodernism is marked by broad skepticism, relativism, or subjectivism; a general doubt in reason, and severe susceptibility to the ideological role in propounding economic and political power (Duignan, 2020). Following are the concepts with examples from the selected text to illustrate postmodernism as skeptical in nature.

5.1 Intertextuality: A Revision of Tale Told

Intertextuality is framing the meaning of text by another text. It can be either through intentional compositional techniques such as *allusion, quotation, calque, translation, pastiche, plagiarism* or *parody* or by interrelationship between alike or related works perceived by textual audience or reader. In simple words, *intertextuality* exhibits an interrelation or connection between texts with the help of varied devices and techniques. Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian-French philosopher coined the term during 1960s. Kristeva (1980) believes, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p. 66).

Adh Adhuray Lok (2019) contains many instances of *intertextuality*. The novel delineates the tragedy of partition. Hence, it can be called a partition novel. Many writers have skillfully tried to depict the traumatic effects of partition in their writings. The first novel delineating the trauma of partition was Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan (1956)*. The novel depicts the story of Mano Majra village situated on river Sutlej near Indo-Pak border. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs live in peace and harmony before partition but after partition, they become deadliest enemies of each other, and Muslims community that is in minority is killed brutally. Another text depicting the

brutalities of partition is Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988). *Adh Adhuraray Lok* (M. H. Khan, 2019) also depicts the brutal realities of the partition. The novel portrays that Hindus and Muslims communities were living peacefully with each other in Bahawalpur State before partition. We can observe that Fiaz, a Muslim young man is pupil of Hindu physician Hakeem Ram Lal. At Hakeem's clinic there is always flood of patients belonging to different communities, but he never demands a single penny.

"*Hakeem Ram Lal kol dwa vi hai tay shfa vi, pr aapren munh dhaila na mangda*" (M. H. Khan, 2019).

(Alongwith medication Hakeem Ram Lal was blessed with cure, but he never demanded a single penny).

"*Riyasti abadi vich bhanven jo musilman ikasi feesad tay hindu,sikh, esai waghera unvi feesad, pr val vi hinduwan smait saray ghair musilmaan ku har qisam di mazhabi azadi hae*" (M. H. Khan, 2019).

(Muslim population was eighty-one percent in state, and Hindus, Sikhs and Christians comprised nineteen percent, but along with Hindus all other non-Muslim communities were enjoying every kind of religious freedom).

But partition changes the scenario like it is depicted in others partition novels. In spite of the tight security given by Nawab of Bahawalpur, Muslims start burning Hindus houses, water is released in Hindus graveyard to avoid incarnation; snakes are thrown into woods which are used for incarnation (M. H. Khan, 2019). Hakeem Ram Lal and his beautiful daughter Tulsi who is the beloved of Fiaz, try to escape and enter into Hindustan, but unfortunately they are killed mercilessly. Fiaz, the protagonist of *Adh Adhuraray Lok* (M. H. Khan, 2019) also reminds us of Jugga of Khushwant Singh's novel *A Train to Pakistan* (1956). As Jugga, at the cost of his own life, saves his Muslim beloved Nooran from Sikhs' brutalities, Fiaz also leaves no stone unturned to save his beloved Tulsi and her family.

Almost all the partition novels depict various characters that use religion as a tool for their personal benefits. In Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988), Dilnawaz joins rioters and participates in violent and barbaric incidents to take revenge from Hindus as a result of Muslims' killings in India. He even abducts Ayah the maid whom he loves by heart and soul and forces her to adopt prostitution just because she is Hindu (Ganie & Rathor, 2017). In *Adh Adhuraray Lok* (2019), a character named Wadhu does the same. He, with the help of masjid imam and his students, tries to kill Hakeem Ram Lal, and burn and seize his property.

"*panjj chi bandian da jattha, molhan maar tay baldian mashalan cha krahen siddha hakeem ram lal di dukan tay gya tay dukan kun ghera pawan tu baad wadday darwazay tay matti da tail sattiya tay bha lah ditti*" (M. H. Khan, 2019).

(A group of five or six persons, with their faces covered and bearing the torches, went straight to Hakeem Ram Lal's shop, blockaded it, threw kerosene on main gate and burnt it").

Adh Adhuraray Lok (2019), like *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *Ice Candy Man* (1988) also uses historical references. All the important figures of partition era have been widely mentioned i.e. Nehru, Lakshmi (Nehru's sister), Jinnah, Nawab of Bahawalpur (Dulha Sain), and Lord Mount Batten. The writer also uses direct quotations in the narrative of the text. At one place, he quotes Bahawalpur State anthem's first two lines, "*Khari dendi aan sanehray inhaan lokan ku, Allah aan vsavay saadian jhokaan ku*" (M. H. Khan, 2019). "Standing here, I am announcing before these people that may Allah make us long lived and prosperous!" At another place, he quotes Seraiki proverb, "*sunji shaye tay vehray di vassu*" (M. H. Khan, 2019). (A function of an unimportant thing is nothing but capturing household place).

5.2 Metanarratives: Systems of Domination and Control

metanarrative or grand narrative or mater narrative is a term proposed by Jean Francois Lyotard which indicates a theory that attempts to render a totalizing and comprehensive account to diverse historical occurrences, experiences and cultural and social phenomena based upon the attraction to universal values and truth. The metanarratives are "big stories" that let us make

sense of the world. Lyotard considers metanarratives as no longer credible because they have lost their credibility (Fahad, Danish, & Asif, 2022). Metanarratives are so significant to us that we make other people follow them even if they like or not. Therefore, they are frequently used to give grounds for domination and control systems. According to Lyotard, in a culture that relies on grand narratives, the predominant regime has a monopoly on knowledge. Lyotard opposes this monopoly and suggests a world of knowledge based on mini narrative. Mini narratives don't contain any universal truths and there is not one way (metanarrative) but many ways (mininarratives).

There was deliberate attempt in subcontinent to construct a national narrative to grow and rationalize their specific ideologies. They exploited people and injected in them the metanarrative of acrimony and hatred. Lyotard looks into the metanarratives and explores them as politically motivated. This incredulity towards metanarrative can also be found in the narrative of the novel *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019). Religion, on both sides of the borders, was treated as the metanarrative in partition times. This can be observed through the conversation of various characters in the novel. In the very first chapter when Dhachchar asks Wadhu to get treatment from Hakeem Ram Lal, Wadhu replies, "*pr hay taan kirar... shfa kun assan ghol peevren*" (He is a non-Muslim, who cares treatment!). He further states, "*har shaye da mazhab honday, dwa da vi tay hakeem da vi. Halal haram da farq honday tu meday eman di paar na patt* (p. 10)." (Everything has a belief; either it is a medicine or a *hakeem*. There should be difference of *halal* and *haram*, don't uproot my faith). This element can also be found in Radhi's (Hakeem Ram Lal's wife) comment when Hakeem sends something through Fiaz, "he is the same ill-fated Musla... he considers himself a competent physician, but have no sense of forbidden" (p. 23). Apropos the annexing of Bahawalpur State, religious metanarrative is revealed at one place when a character states, "*howon musilmaan tay rallun kiraran naal, ay keeven thi sgday* (p. 49)." (How is it possible that we are Muslims and aspire to annex with non-Muslims!)"

The postmodern theory of refusal of metanarrative can also be traced in *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019). There are many instances of rejection of religion as a metanarrative, especially when it is used as a tool to justify barbarous actions and to gain some benefits. The protagonist of the novel Fiaz rejects his father's saying and says, "*Jay ay kirar dwa de skde tan oon kanu hikmat sikhannr vich mekun kia mehnra*" (p. 20). (If the medication given by non-Muslim is acceptable, what is bad in learning medicating"). Fiaz' (a Muslim young man) affair with Tulsi (a Hindu girl), his protection of property of Hindu family, and his help in their escapement are also few of the instances of rejection of metanarrative.

5.3 Historiographic Metafiction: Mistrust of Conventional History

A Canadian theorist of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon regards *historiographic metafiction* as reproduction of history through a blend of fact and fiction, fragmentation, parody, irony and other postmodern devices. As a genre, it explores the limitations of conventional discourse of history as it brings about various substitute versions, intending to recount history. Postmodern philosophy regards history as discursive because it is subjectively constructed through texts. Therefore, the notions of reality, neutrality and accuracy are no more relevant (Ashraf, 2017). Postmodernism investigates history in a critical manner and seeks to problematize the existing knowledge of history.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction cripples the faith on traditional notion of history as it emphasizes the multiplicity of narratives. It does not follow official records of history rather it looks history through mininarratives. The novel *Adh Ahuray Lok* (2019) is a good example of historiographic metafiction. Hafeez Khan himself cautions the reader before the start of first chapter, "*Ay novel farzi kirdaran tay vaaqiaat de zariye haqeeqi tareekhi tanazur wich likhiya gaye*" (p. 6). (This novel written depicts fictional characters and incidents in real historical perspective). At official level, a metanarrative was set that partition would be a blessing as it would change the lives of each sect in a positive way. Through micro narrative, it exhibits that during partition women and men were killed, people were looted, their houses were burnt, and people lost their identities. The novel depicts that how at micro level partition was agonizing kind of experience. Hakeem Ram Lal has to leave his long life earnings and property, and is killed while migrating to Hindustan. Fiaz is separated from his beloved Tulsi. After partition, Bahawalpur State announces to annex with Pakistan purely on religious grounds. In fifties, One Unit, another metanarrative, is established in the name of solidarity and harmony. Bahawalpur State is also

merged into West Pakistan with the formation of One Unit. As a result, natives are ignored and every business is captured by migrants. After the annulment of One Unit, instead of restoring the status of Bahawalpur as a province, it is merged into Punjab. This all creates identity issues and existential complexities in natives. *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) beautifully depicts these issues through the depiction of various characters, especially Fiaz.

5.4 Hyperreality: The Blurry Representation

Hyperreality is perceived as a state in which real and fiction is mixed together so that there is not obvious distinction where one starts and where one ends. According to Baudrillard, *hyperreality* is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Antony & Trambo, 2020). The idea of *hyperreality* is closely connected to his concept of simulacrum which he elaborates as something which takes place of reality with its representation. Baudrillard states that the present day world is *simulacrum*, where false image has taken the place of reality. It has happened to such an extent that it is not possible to mark difference between real and unreal. It is in this context that he issued a controversial statement about the Gulf War being not taken place, as the world saw it as presented by media (Nambrol, 2016).

Furthermore, hyperreality can also be taken as preoccupation that brings the lost or forgotten memories. The recollections are kept alive by giving out a copy, imitation and replica. But the trouble is generated when these memories are represented in the present time, and, in the end, the contact with reality is lost (Sumitro, Yuliadi, Kurniawansyah, Najamudin, & Umanilo, 2020). The novel *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) depicts the partition times and its effects on the people of Bahawalpur almost seven decades after the incident. Whatever the reality was, historians failed to exhibit the comprehensive enormity of this tragic incident. The tragic situations of partition were presented by partition writers different from those of historians. Urdu writers of partition i.e. Manto, Nanak Singh, Ismat Chughtai, Rajindar Singh Bedi, Krishan Chandar etc. depicted partition with their own meaning and perspective. In the same way, partition writers who wrote in English i.e. Bapsi Sidhwa, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie etc. presented the turbulent times of partition with their own angle. It would not be exaggeration to say that hundreds of fictional works have been produced on the subject, still this trend continues. Moreover, the Hindu writers' perspective, the Muslims writers' perspective, and Sikhs' writers' perspective of depiction of partitions also varies from each other. The reality becomes hyperreality when the subject is discussed and depicted with fictional characters under different religious metanarratives, with different languages, and in different times.

5.5 Pastiche: A Blank Parody

Pastiche is a copy of strange style and is contrary to the concept of postmodern *parody* presented by Linda Hutcheon. According to Linda Hutcheon, *parody* is a thoughtful recovery of existing structures. On the contrary, Fredric Jameson considers postmodern *parody* as *blank parody* having no political goal. Jameson views that *pastiche* has taken the place of *parody* in postmodern age. *Pastiche* is the copy of unique style, but it is, unlike *parody*, an unprejudiced exercise of mimicry, having no ulterior motives like *parody*, and cut off from satiric inclination, without laughter (Jameson, 1991). *Parody* copies style, manner, or characteristics of unique literary work, author or genre. On the other hand, *pastiche* amalgamates or pastes numerous elements. Modernist authors had inimitable and individual styles, while in postmodern *pastiche*; the styles of modern era have become codes in postmodern age. It has left people with nothing but "a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (*ibid*). In such a world that is characterized by pastiche, the connection of people to history is lost and history reverts to a series of genres, styles or, as Baudrillard would say, *simulacra*. Jameson, like Baudrillard, highly disapproves present historical conditions as it has left us "with nothing but texts" (Jameson, 1991, p. 18).

In the novel *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019), there is the amalgamation of history and fiction or in Hutcheon's words '*historiographic metafiction*'. The author Hafeez Khan himself states in this regard that "this novel written depicts fictional characters and incidents in real historical perspective" (M. H. Khan, 2019). Generally speaking, the author (Hafeez Khan) copies the styles of various partition novelists. Almost all the partition novelists, through fictional characters, depict the pictures of agonies of common masses during partition times. In the similar manner, *Adh Adhuray Lok* (M. H. Khan, 2019) depicts the conditions of people residing in Bahawalpur State. Specifically, if we compare it with *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *Ice Candy Man* (1988), it also follows the styles of both of these novels. The novel, like both novels, delineates the picture

of harmony and peace among people before partition. It also depicts the barbarous incidents after partition. Protagonists of these three novels have their love from the different religious communities. The end of *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) also seems to be copying *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *Ice Candy Man* (1988). The end of these three novels is near border area; Jugga in *Train to Pakistan* attempts to save the life of his beloved on bridge near border; *Ice Candy Man* (Dilnawaz) crosses the border; Fiaz' dead body is also thrown near border in the end. So, in the process of *pastiche* i.e. the amalgamation or pasting of various styles, the reiterated heterogeneity, the connection of people with true history is lost.

6. Conclusion

The above discussion clearly demonstrates that the selected concepts put forth by various theorists within the realm of postmodernism reveal its skeptical nature. Intertextuality introduces doubt regarding the text's uniqueness and authenticity. Metanarratives are deemed unreliable due to their association with systems of domination and control. History is viewed with skepticism as it is perceived to be subjectively constructed. In the postmodern age, hyperreality prevails, making it difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is unreal. Pastiche, characterized by the imitation of various styles, distances people from history and engenders doubt. The analysis of the novel *Adh Adhuray Lok* (2019) through these concepts highlights its embodiment of the key features of a postmodern novel.

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