

Disconcerting the Colonizers: Delhi as a Parable of Struggle in Reclaiming National Consciousness in Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*



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Abstract: *Twilight in Delhi* represents the colonial oppression and argues that this suppression functions as resistance, shaping the literature which challenges the dominant colonial narrative by the awareness of tradition, culture and history in reclaiming national consciousness. *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmad Ali is widely acknowledged as a literary masterpiece that captures the quintessence of Delhi and was created amidst the turbulent times of the late 1930s. The text delves into the subjects of colonialism, resistance, gender roles, nostalgia, and the examination of both traditional and modern cultural clashes. The text explores the concept of resistance whether psychological, cultural, and political, by analyzing the portrayal of images and events in the novel. It specifically examines the process of decolonization, whether it be physical or psychological. Ahmed Ali depicted the devastation of society, culture, ethical principles, and economy at both individual and national scales. This qualitative research uses conceptual content analysis of the selected text emphasized on the characteristics of struggle and resistance, using theoretical framework by Frantz Fanon's influential work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, to understand the clash between traditional values and the modernism brought about by colonialism. The novel provides a deeper comprehension of the resistance endeavors and the human toll of colonial supremacy in Delhi, ultimately reflecting the wider battles against imperialism. Ahmad Ali challenges and dismantles readers' colonial mindset while advocating for India's liberation from the Empire. Furthermore, the novel's focus on the historical achievements of Indo-Muslim civilization conveys a strong message of resistance against British colonial rule.

Keywords: Contemporary South Asian fiction in English, Delhi, a metaphor of resistance, subversion, sociocultural resistance, Indo-Muslim civilization.

1. Introduction

The title of Ahmed Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* itself is very vast. *Twilight in Delhi*, first published in London in 1940, is commonly regarded by scholars of literature as a romantic narrative centered around the city of Delhi. It is the most correct and appropriate name for the story he tells in the novel. The novel explores

various aspects of life in Delhi during the early twentieth century, including personal and communal experiences and the city's gradual decline and deterioration. The novel comprehensively examines the sociocultural landscape of Delhi throughout the initial two decades of the 20th century while also providing a retrospective analysis of the distressing and catastrophic events that occurred in the non-

communal Indo-Muslim environment of Delhi in 1857.

This novel was published in London during the last years of the British Raj. While British novelists were rethinking the portrayals of British India in their literary works, the British Empire experienced a state of ambivalence, split between its previous accomplishments and the moral responsibility linked to its acts. Contrary to this, Indian novelists exhibited a distinct fascination with British colonialism since they were preoccupied with the concept of nationalism and eagerly anticipated the parting of the British Empire from India.

National consciousness refers to a sense of honor, belonging, attachment and national awareness that an individual has toward his nation. Nation-building must include national consciousness. It upholds essential values, including national unity, pursuit of sustainable development; love for country and respect for human rights, culture, religion, diversity and the environment.

Twilight in Delhi is a good and wise destination to read about Muslim life in Delhi. Because fall of the Mughal Empire, recent rough investigations in Muslim society were divided, and the traditional and specifically Muslim people were unmatched in 1858. This story examines the growing bad things among Muslims during the second decade of the 20th century. The novel's title implies that the city of Delhi is not at the peak of its greatness now, and Mir Nihal's premonition installs in the reader a foreboding that the city will soon leap into the night clouds. All things considered, after the end of the novel, each becomes completely and figuratively boring.

The artistic intellect was in the process of developing a novel method of writing that primarily exhibited indigenizing, progressive, and revolutionary characteristics. The writing style emerged due to the convergence of diverse social, economic, and political influences (Blake 2011). The inception of the South Asian novel marked the emergence of progressive upheavals, drastic transformations, a juxtaposition of suffering and optimism, and the complex

interplay between imperial triumph and distress. (Bill, Griffiths, Ashcroft, et al 2003)

In 1939, after the publication of Angarez, an intrepid collection of Urdu short stories that sparked the creation of the Progressive Writers' Movement and Association, India experienced a notable advancement. Ahmad Ali arrived in London with the manuscript of his work. Before he came, he had already gained a specific degree of fame and notoriety in India as a writer of innovative and often rebellious short stories written in Urdu (Anderson, 86).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* offers a story set against the colonial-era backdrop of Delhi, documenting an effort to win back national self-awareness amidst British occupation. The novel's depiction of Delhi serves as a parable for the picture that emerges through this research, which explores how all the characters are engaged in multifaceted struggles and resistance to preserve their cultural identity and rediscover national consciousness. Moreover, the colonial period is examined in terms of how it affected the inhabitants' cultural, social and psychological identity as portrayed in *In Delhi*. It aims to investigate the tensions and conflicts that arose between characters within the manuscript from this clash of tradition with modernity brought to their world by these colonial intruders.

1.2 Objectives of The Study

This study foregrounds to investigate the effects of bewildering and their application to colonized societies. The study is incorporated on the following objectives.

To find out what are the approaches used by the colonized to disconcert the colonizers?

To explore what are the features of resistance of resistance that are portrayed in the novel *Twilight in Delhi*?

1.3 Research Questions

The study attempts to explore the following research questions

1. What are the approaches used by the colonized to disconcert the colonizers??

2. What are the features of resistance of resistance that are portrayed in the novel *Twilight in Delhi*?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the field the postcolonial literature with its detailed analysis of decolonization processes, national consciousness and relations among society as colonized people. This research delves into Ahmad Ali's "*Twilight in Delhi*" as a mirror through which it analyzes these complex issues of cultural identity and resistance to colonialism. What makes it of special interest is that its viewpoint on literature as you described above discusses history and social changes, especially in the colonial period. Through studying the novel's portrayal of Delhi, it illuminates various aspects and effects on cultural consciousnesses from colonial rule. Of course, this understanding does not only concern literature but also history and culture.

2. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper analyses *Twilight in Delhi* as a subversive literary work. This approach considers reading the novel's text with respect to the theme and interprets the notion of resistance as it is proposed by Frantz Fanon. He has left us with significant and illuminating writings on colonialism, racial discrimination, and psychological consequences resulting from oppression in individuals and groups. Fanon's book "*The Wretched of the Earth*" addresses resistance and identity formation under colonialism. Fanon's book "*The Wretched of the Earth*" discusses resistance and identity politics under colonialism.

Resistance: Fanon stressed the need to resist the colonial oppression. His point was that resistance whether psychological, cultural, and political could be the best way in which the colonized would regain their inherent dignity and worthiness of living. To him, this approach was a mandatory path to decolonization and true freedom (Fanon 1963).

Emotional Effects of Oppression: Fanon explored the mental impact of colonialism upon

the colonized subjected by the colonizer. Specifically, he depicted the situation whereby the oppressed felt inhumanness, which led them to low self-esteem and even internalized self-hatred. According to Fanon, resistance was the most effective way to heal this psychological injury and regain the ability to be in charge and be worthy.

Reclaiming National Consciousness: Fanon thought that in order for colonies to be freed from colonialism, the people of the colony had first must reject this false identity foisted upon them and resume their true cultural, social and political characteristics. Taking history, tradition and heritage as weapons against colonial oppression which was trying to destroy manhood and humanity. First and foremost, for Fanon is national consciousness--an awareness of belonging to a free nation. Moreover, freedom from colonial domination brings to people a liberation of the mind as well (Fanon 1963).

Fanon's description of resistance is multilayered. He not only describes the physical aspects but also psychological, cultural and political ones as well. The resistance to colonial domination must be a unified process in which the individual and the collective are transformed (Barry 2002).

Thus, Fanon's writings on resistance and identity politics still remain an important lens through which to see the psychological effects of colonization and the necessity for finding true and real identities as we fight for our freedom. His work has deeply strengthened the debate on decolonization, identity creation and complexity around power within postcolonial societies. He has also contributed to decolonial thinking, identity creation and the problems caused by post-colonialism.

3. Literature Review

Kanwal Zahra and Abou Bakar's (2017) bring a study based on Fanon's adaptation of psychoanalysis theory which proposes that in colonial settings, those who are marginalized or outcast experience the order imposed upon them by society as an object source psychological problem. This study focuses on how *Twilight in Delhi* addresses the problem of Muslim marginalization, which contributes to

psychiatric illnesses. Additionally, it concentrates on the situations or conditions—highlighted in the novel—that result in the mental health issues that Muslims in Delhi face.

Concerns over the future of the nation's professed secular values and sizable Muslim minority have intensified as a result of the dominance of Hindu nationalist parties, which has given many in India and the diaspora the confidence to demand the establishment of an exclusively Hindu nation state. When one closely examines Ali's depiction of the Mughal monuments and Delhi, one finds that these areas are considered to be both Hindu and Muslim in nature, making them evocative loci of composite Indian identity. According to the article, Ali's novel serves as a refutation of persistent claims that Muslims have no legitimate claim to the nation. It is a moving memorialization of a diverse India at a time when independence was imminent (Kennedy, Monika 2019)

Tariq, and Fatima (2019) explore, a number of startling similarities between *Twilight in Delhi* and *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*: are highlighted, including the fact that both works are historical fiction and that they both portray colonization and cultural hegemony. Although resistance is a typical occurrence as well, current study indicates that the type and motivation of the resistance varies in the two novels. Fanon's theories on the negative effects of colonization on colonized people's mentality are supported by the study. Although both novels end in loss and nothingness, Tariq Ali depicts the decline without feeling regret or self-pitying, and his novel offers a more positive and constructive portrayal of Muslims as socially and religiously tolerant people. In contrast, Ahmed Ali laments the loss and decline of the Muslim Empire, indulges in nostalgia, and longs for the rehabilitation of his past.

Khurshid (2020) aims to do a discourse analysis of *Twilight in Delhi* in order to show how being surrounded by stories may heal our wounded feeling of national identity. According to him, the history of Islam in India is a sequentially crafted narrative in which Muslims and Hindus coexisted in perfect social and cultural harmony. Mir Nihal's narrative does not address the Hindu

viewpoint because he seeks to regain his lost authority and fears that doing so will destroy the idea of national unity that is required to repel the colonizer. His conception of nationhood is strengthened by the historical narrative that he chooses to emphasize, the legendary history of India under the Asoka and Chundergupta Maurya dynasties, and the Muslim conquest.

Andleeb, Khan, and Ahmad (2020) in their article, attempt to dissect *Twilight in Delhi* and Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*, which present two diametrically opposed concepts of optimism and despair. Singh and Ali's comparative perspectives on Delhi help to shape the city's ontological, political, and ideological framework. The relevance of Delhi as a symbol of political energy that either distributes or seizes power as an active agent of power-history is examined in this study. The socio-political, economic, and sectarian institutions that Ali and Singh depicted are displayed in the study.

Asghar, Mir Nihal, Begum Nihal, Begum Jamal, and Bilqeece are five characters that are archetypes of prominent members of Indian Muslim households. These stereotypical people give Ali a background against which to illustrate his sociopolitical theory. Ali, standing in for the intolerance-loving but uncaring citizen, urges him to rise up and fight to change his society by methodical changes to the transitivity patterns that Mir Nihal is associated with. Through transitivity patterning among the many narrative perspectives used in the work, the analysis clarifies differences in point of view in the character representation. (Khan, Nijat Ullah, et al 2022).

Lakshmi (2022) opines that, *Twilight in Delhi* explores the tension between cultures in pre-independence Delhi. In the first section of the book, Ali perfectly encapsulated the spirit of Old Delhi; but, in the latter section, he depicted, with great agony, how drastically the city has changed, with a noticeable shift in culture and customs. With his beliefs firmly ingrained in opulent Muslim culture, Mir Nihal, an upper-middle class individual, appears to be challenging Asghar's theory, which is based on Western society.

Iqbal, and Haque (2022), by applying the theoretical insights of postcolonialism, represent, *A Passage to India* is a record of the British colony by the colonizer E. M. Forster, whereas, *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali too deals with the same but from the perspective of the colonized. For Edward W. Said, the West represents the East in a way that helps in presenting a dominating position of the West and it represents the East as inferior, superstitious, uncivilized and evil. Moreover, the current study has probed the issue of cultural representation by employing textual analyses and applied Homi K. Bhabha (1997) and Edward Said's (2012) theoretical works on representation in postcolonial theoretic paradigm. The analyses have shown that both the texts represent colonial India quite differently because of the cultural positions of the writers as the colonizer and the colonized.

4. Analysis & Discussion

The story depicts a clash of two social demands: customs and advancements. Situations have arisen in great numbers when Western systems of life and tolerance have entered the homes and souls of Indians. Mir Nihal, the epitome of recent tradition, suffers from this "cross-cultural," which is perhaps "a mixture of Indian and Western ways, which he cannot do alone."

Delhi exemplified the authentic essence of the unenlightened harmonization of the different cultural and religious elements in India. The city served as the political center of a sovereign territory, characterized by a diverse population that presented both complex difficulties and advantageous prospects on a worldwide level. The amalgamation of Buddhist, Turk, Afghan, and Central Asian values resulted in a harmonic blend. Colonial control in India not only presented a significant threat to the cultural and economic aspects of the nation, but it also brought about a profound transformation in the individual and collective consciousness of the native population.

Twilight in Delhi might be interpreted as a means of subversion, representing the cultural struggle of the inhabitants of Delhi against the political and cultural dominance imposed by the

British Raj. During the early 1900s, a significant movement of the capital of the Indian Empire from Calcutta to Delhi resulted in widespread discontent among the populace. The tale portrays the disillusionment experienced by the inhabitants of Delhi and their resolute opposition to the Raj. The alterations proposed by the Empire were met with strong disapproval from the inhabitants of Delhi. Delhi served as more than just a metropolis for its inhabitants; it embodied the rich cultural heritage of the Indo-Muslim culture that had thrived for ages. One could posit that the Empire was engaged in the destruction of this invaluable historical record. According to Fanon the colonialist frequently distorts, disfigures, and destroys the historical narratives of the colonized (149).

4.1 Delhi's Resistance to The Empire

In a more focused manner, the novel prominently utilizes repeated nostalgia and a profound feeling of loss as strategic devices for subversion, as asserted by the author as being fundamental to the novel's overarching subject (Ali 277). The novel extensively explores the themes of Delhi's grandeur and rich cultural heritage while also delving into the concepts of subversion and resistance within its story. In his contemplation of the illustrious history, Ali reflects upon Delhi as a city that embodies both aspirations and actualities. However, he laments that the present transformation of this city has resulted in an altered state that is scarcely recognizable. Mir Nihal is afraid of social and linguistic heteroglossia. He has no time for the untouchables in the city's social scene. Ahmed Ali has let the world know what he thinks about the untrustworthy assumption through his harsh rejection of the untouchables. The presence of foreigners threatens this country's culture. We must protect it with the use of visas. The main purpose of writing a novel is to find out who you are. When the author takes the time to look inside himself, the abstract system he uses will become clear to the reader, who can then better understand his characters and the story (Wasiuddin 2023).

The individuals residing in Delhi express derogatory comments and criticize foreigners. The historical Chandani Chowk, which was

once a vibrant cultural hub in Delhi and considered the essence of the city, has unfortunately been significantly altered by external forces known as the Farangis. The location exuded such vibrancy that it evoked fond recollections for nearly every resident of Delhi. The defacement of Chandani Chowk incited widespread anger among the populace. According to Ali the distinctiveness and oriental ambiance of Delhi were eradicated (204). The city walls, which had vestiges and glimpses of the refinements and graces shown in the haveli and kothas, had collapsed.

The advent of "New Delhi" marked the commencement of the decline of the Delhi Wallahs, who served as the guardians of the rich cultural heritage of the Indo-Muslim civilization in India for centuries. However, the residents of Delhi were precisely forecasting the decline of the British colonial rule:

According to Ali the novel exhibits a sense of prophetic anticipation, akin to the rumblings of distant thunder, which foreshadow the imminent arrival of a transformative era characterized by renewed optimism, aspirations, and liberation. This statement resonates with the slogan of anti-colonial political struggle espoused by Fanon, which posits that it follows cultural resistance (109). According to Fanon it is contended that the colonized population would eventually realize that a nation's presence cannot be substantiated solely by cultural aspects but rather by the collective efforts of individuals in their resistance against the occupying forces (113).

It's time to break free of the old ideas of race and class. The world needs more people like us. We have nothing but good to offer. People were robbed of the wealth of life, looted by the outsiders, and their potency plundered. An analogous condition is now winning in Pakistani society. Pakistanis are having an even more difficult time in this culture now that their young age is becoming a victim of their own culture. Pakistan's culture is quite similar to India's culture. Springtime has a solid trend toward outside development and overpowering previous human advances and principles (249).

Ali explores the various facets of existence, ranging from the repulsive to the sublime, while also acknowledging the cultural obligations and the lingering effects of colonialism on the Muslim communities of Delhi and Lucknow. This is exemplified in his novel *Ocean of Night*. The individual's sentimentality towards the illustrious historical era of medieval India, alongside their profound feelings of deprivation, serves to fortify their inclination towards subversion and rebellion. The work highlights a significant emphasis on the principles inherent in the Indo-Muslim civilization and its historical context.

Mir Nihal, who was living in an impossible dream of the past, couldn't accept his current state. His appearance and mood matched the needs of the Muslim community at that time. They cannot live in seemingly changing conditions because they feel that these are often the most uncomfortable conditions for Muslims. As Nihal puts it: "Attributing very little to the melodic treatment of Asghar Bilquees's affections, the autumnal perspective at the end of the novel is struck by the sufferings of the Mughal past and, therefore, the constant clarity in his synthesized style, Ali is not from a gloomy point of view but a model point of view. He sees the eternal plan of the important segments of human life as individuals, as before, every moment.

The novel's strength lies in its profound and all-encompassing portrayal of the social and cultural dynamics inside the Indo-Muslim civilization of ancient times. This culture, characterized by its pride, diversity, and harmony, existed prior to the establishment of British rule in India. One may posit that *Twilight in Delhi* can be perceived as a feeble imitation of Delhi's cultural essence. However, when viewed through a Fanonian lens, it can be seen as a subversive and resistant force against the infiltration of an external civilization (Barry 2002).

4.2 Mr. Nihal's Resistance to The Empire

Mir Nihal's characters are drawn with great sophistication and precision. He was the one who saw with his own eyes the final scene of the

delivery of Delhi on September 14, 1857, a decisive day. He is a nationalist at heart. He suffers and suffers from the slavery of India, but is confident of directly using the weapons system to liberate the country, but mobilized on the "unnecessary" resources provided by the people as an unwelcome development, March, strikes, and dependencies.

The character of Mir Nihal is a seasoned agent who has seen the nation in subjugation with his own eyes. So, he hates the ruler. The other end is the younger, her child who loves British style and style. According to Mir Nihal, it also talks about Indo-Islamic culture in its way, but takes smaller spaces and takes everything into account (222). They both sing and capture a passionate young woman. Mir Nihal has Babin Yang and a younger Mir has Master Bike, but she eventually "keeps" Babin Yang until his death, gives up Master Bike, and begins to take Bill Keith very seriously. Gives For her achievements as a wife. It's another story about him, however, finally coming out of his emotional experience or making his race to find a new wife without being unnaturally (218).

Mir Nihal is portrayed as a figure who hates the rulers since he witnessed the nation's descent into slavery as one of the agents of the Wise Age. He is a mature man of 62 years, and his appearance reflects the reverence of Islam. Mir Nihal's idea is useless. His indulgence showed his lack of temperament in an unwelcome passion for change. Asghar's rejection of marriage was the most important moment of his life when the whole family betrayed his choice.

The idea of this character is invisible. He is always excited. Pigeon and his flamboyant wife Babin Yang. Resignation is intrinsically undesirable in an understanding of harmony within the environment. It was believed that Muslims remained immortal because they believed their aristocracy was permanent in the past, but when the leadership power was lost, they were filled, changing the environment. The question of early marriage was one of the most important moments of his life when he did not question his refusal, and the whole family betrayed his decision, which was the beginning of progress.

4.3 Delhi, an Embalm of Tradition

Delhi has long been held by Muslims. They created their way of life and distinguished their own beliefs. Where there is religion, there is superstition. Hence, he also gave a gift to the Islamic community in Delhi. Ahmed Ali embodies perfect Islamic beauty despite the notoriety of Mir Nihal's circle of friends. During the day, Mir Nihal represents the entire Islamic tradition in Delhi during the Mughal Empire. Their way of life is their personality, and they cannot ignore it. Mir Nihal and his circle of friends are stuck in their old property. He can only forgive children once he lives in English. He wants his child to follow the tradition. The customs were inherited by the means and way of life of his ancestors that they left him. He allowed the circle of relatives to adopt a standard way of life, and the tradition of the gate is little known today. Flying pigeons, trowel trips, loaded brothels, and poetic gatherings have all been incorporated into this tradition. In addition, the girl took care of her in the kitchen, but it became the boy's duty to provide bread for his family. The corruption of this tradition blurs the way of life for all. Brightness gains immediately after dusk.

The picture of Islamic human development and its subsequent decline towards surrender shows that this is not attractive to the Islamic people. Like Chinua Achebe, Ahmed Ali also painted an accurate picture of imperialism. With the spread of expansionism, many countries, including Muslims, have offended their character, but they are not always under pressure to adopt the British character. If Delhi were to expand, the Muslims allowed Britain to control it for another 100 years. In fact, after reading the whole novel, it can be said that the Muslims explained the British invasion and their actions with great kindness. Asghar Ali is a prime example of personal equality. Fundamentalist hero Mir Nihal now accuses his child of learning the British way of life, but he does it deliberately (188).

The British torrent left traditions behind in the city of Delhi. The way of life was neither Islamic nor British reality, rather it became a mixture of these countries. Ahmad Ali expresses "Twilight

in Delhi" next to the radical name because the sun is a few kilometers above the horizon and time cannot be expressed as day and night but as a combination of both. Novel's expression needed no further explanation. From the phrase, you can imagine the difficulty of the trunk. It means a gentle descent, just after sunset, but figuratively, a departure from some givens. He describes the time between the collapse of Islam and the rise of the British Empire. It is also a symbol of low traditions and supersedes better traditions. It also highlights the importance of skepticism. It also shows a retreat from a quiet lifestyle to a dark lifestyle. So, these are the reasons why Ahmed Ali chose the name "Twilight in Delhi" for his novel.

The protagonist Mir Nihal's yearning and loneliness turn into subversion and resistance toward the book's conclusion. He recalls his early years as being "buried in the wreckage of dreams, [and] recollections of days and hours came swarming upon them like flies. Delhi had fallen, India had been plundered, and everything he had stood for had been destroyed" (Ali 250).

However, in the streets of Delhi, the volume of shouting and gun noises becomes increasingly audible. Both British soldiers, commonly referred to as "Tommies," and Indian policemen patrol the area, responding to any signs of unrest by employing firearms against the unruly crowd. The Indian resistance is transforming a reactionary movement characterized by a surge of newfound independence within the Hindustan region. This has resulted in a fervent ignition of anger and hatred within the hearts of the Indian population (Ali 247). Consequently, every child in Delhi takes pride in reciting a renowned political song that gained popularity during the Balkan War.

"The wish for glory and martyrdom
Has begun to sway our hearts again.
We shall try his skills and see
What strength is in the enemy 's hand?"

"Let the time come we will show
What courage there is in us still.
Why should we tell you now what we

Have in our hearts? –the power of will

"But, traveller on the road of love,

Tire and weary not in the way:

The pleasure of tramping the desert is

Greater the farther is the goal away." (Ali 258).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, drawing upon the Fanonism perspective, postcolonial writers employ a distinct approach of resistance by evoking or constructing a precolonial representation of their own nations. This deliberate choice serves as a rejection of the modern cultural influences, which carries the inherent influence of colonialism upon their country. Hence, the story endeavored to depict cultural resistance and political strife. The work is characterized by the pervasive presence of subversion, which is a reoccurring motif that is both implicitly and openly depicted throughout the text (Wasiuddin 2023). The work predominantly utilizes colloquial language to portray the regional concerns, showcasing the evolution of cultural opposition into a political and retaliatory clash with the Raj.

Twilight in Delhi evokes a pervasive sentiment of substantial loss. The narrative encapsulates the gradual decline of a whole culture, characterized by a distinct manner of thinking and way of life, as observed by the author. The narrative commences by evoking a sense of longing for the illustrious history of Delhi, symbolically embodying the inclusive Indo-Islamic civilization of Medieval India. It then unfolds by challenging the oppressive colonial domination over Delhi's culture and the derogatory treatment of its indigenous inhabitants.

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