



GURNAH'S CONTRIBUTION TO POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE AS A NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

Karimov U. N. 1,

Jumaboeva B. A. 2

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

1PhD., Associate Professor at Uzbekistan State World Languages University

2 Master's Degree Student at Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Abstract

Prominent writer with African origin Abdulrazak Gurnah was awarded with Nobel Prize in 2021 in literature “for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents.”. Post-colonialism is an important theme in many novels, often reflecting the author's personal experiences of displacement and cultural upheaval. In this context, the author's forced migration with his family from Zanzibar (Africa) to the UK has a profound impact, shaping narratives that explore identity, belonging and the complexities of postcolonial existence.

Keywords: Colonialism, post-colonialism, Nobel Prize, Abdulrazak Gurnah, immigrants, Africans.

Introduction

Abdulrazak Gurnah was born in 1948 on 20th of December in Zanzibar, which is one part of the United Republic of Tanzania in eastern Africa. Following the 1964 coup and subsequent persecution, at the age of eighteen he escaped to England to continue his studies. Nowadays he lives in Canterbury, Kent, England. From time to time he goes to his birthplace, to say exactly to Tanzania to visit his family members and he says “I am from there. In my mind I live there.” Abdulrazak Gurnah, a Nobel laureate, hails from a Muslim family of Yemeni heritage, a background that profoundly influenced his acclaimed novels exploring themes of displacement, colonialism, and identity. In works of Monica Bungaro, it is stated that: “Having been educated in Tanzania, worked in Nigeria and migrated to England, Abdulrazak Gurnah has personally experienced the ways in which



conflict between exclusivist and eclectic concepts of racial identity galvanizes one's own life into new initiatives and responsibilities.”¹

Gurnah is renowned as a scholar of African-Arab author whose fiction is often regarded as exceptional artistic accomplishments, as well as international postcolonial literature. Along with short tales, he has so far released ten novels, one of which, *Paradise*, was on the Booker and Whitbread Prize shortlist. *Desertion and By the Sea* were chosen for the Booker Prize and the Los Angeles Times Book Award, respectively. A number of Western languages, including Swedish, German, and French, have translated the majority of Gurnah's writings. Due to his accomplishments, the Swedish Academy declared Gurnah the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature On October 7, 2021. Abdulrazak Gurnah, in a compelling interview, eloquently described his writing process, revealing a deeply personal motivation interwoven with a desire for wider engagement. He didn't begin with grand literary ambitions but rather with a personal need – a desire to grapple with his own understanding of the world.

Gurnah's novels aren't simply crafted tales; they represent a continuous exploration of his identity, his experiences, and his interpretations of the complexities of the human condition, specifically within the context of postcolonial realities often experienced by East Africans. This intimate connection between his life and his work is evident in the profound emotional depth and nuanced portrayal of characters grappling with displacement, cultural conflict, and the lingering shadows of colonialism – themes consistently explored throughout his extensive literary oeuvre. His novels, therefore, serve as powerful testaments to the transformative power of storytelling and the profound ability of literature to foster understanding and empathy across cultures.

In an interview with a French journalist Catherine Fruchon-Toussaint on RFI's book show *Littérature sans Frontières* Abdulrazak Gurnah was asked about his feelings of winning Nobel prize and he answers: “Well, there's a reaction, which is to be completely surprised, which is not necessarily the gut reaction, but rather the reaction to the phone call thinking, "Is this real? Is this a joke?" But after that, it became clear that it was true. I was very proud and honoured to be awarded this

¹ Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie: A Narrative of (Un)Belonging*



prize and to be invited to join this this group of writers many of whose work I've admired for years.”²

Abdulrazak Gurnah was a keen observer of colonialism and the effects of post-colonialism on social life in Africa. Abdulrazak Gurnah started writing in 2004 when he was 21 years old. While living in the UK, Abdulrazak Gurnah felt the typical sense of stumbling over the stages of non-fulfillment of plans and developed an overwhelming view of foreignness, difference and detachment.

The essence of colonialism and postcolonialism as observed by Abdulrazak Gurnah can be seen in the fact that his novel works such as *Memory in Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990) highlight the aspects of the anti-social and disturbing experiences faced by the immigrants in Britain at that time, including the effects of racism and loss of social identity. Thus, it is evident that Abdulrazak Gurnah essentially focused on the plight and misery of refugees faced by immigrants who had traveled to Britain and fell victim to racism and loss of social identity. In addition, Abdulrazak Gurnah's criticism took an intense turn in his novel *Paradise*, published in 1994. This novel was essentially about the experiences and social differences that had emerged in colonial East Africa under the impact of the First World War.

Abdulrazak Gurnah, considered one of the best storytellers of his time, attempted to portray the connection between social insecurity, the threat of colonialism, economic uncertainty, restrictions on speech and protest. The repressed love for Rehenah and Martin's inability to express it can be seen as an expression of the social danger that Africans live through, along with the added climax of cross-cultural dissonance, accusations, atrocities, social humiliation and lack of social competence.

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