



'THE CONTAINMENT OF THE NATIVE': A COLONIAL- NEOCOLONIAL THEME IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE HUNGRY TIDE AND IRIS MURDOCH'S THE SEA, THE SEA

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Introduction

One of the dominating themes of Colonialism, and its sequel, Neocolonialism has been the "idea of containment" as man critics have already discussed at length. Colonialism saw the widespread of controlling, regulating the exploiting the resources in the established colonies of the white masters in a direct manner, where as neocolonialism generally represents the actions and effects of certain remnant features and agents of the colonial era in a given society. Post-colonial studies have shown that even after independence, the influences of colonialism and its agents are still very much present in the lives of most former colonies.

The subtly promoted socio-economic and political activities by former colonial rulers with the intention of bolstering capitalism, neo-liberal globalisation, and the cultural enslavement of their former colonies is known as neocolonialism. The old colonial masters make sure that the newly independent colonies continue to rely on them for political and economic guidance in a

neocolonial state. For the economic, political, ideological, cultural, and military advantage of the home states of the colonial masters, the socioeconomic and political life of the newly independent colonies is dependent upon and exploited. Rather than using direct military force, as was the case during the colonial era, this is typically accomplished through indirect control of the political and economic policies of the recently independent governments.

Jean Paul Sartre's Colonialism and Neocolonialism (1964) contains the first recorded use of the term neocolonialism. The term has become an essential theme in African Philosophy, most especially in African political philosophy. The text highlights the aftermath of colonial legacy and the impact of the process of decolonization on helpless common citizens. 'Colonialism' backed out after back lashing the entire well being and tolerance of the subcontinent. The multiple layers of domination and power play is brought out in the text. When the colonial masters leave the country the state/elite becomes the harbinger of domination and



subjugation. State as a regular institute of power, whether foreign or civil, is resisted and abolished. The alter awareness the text builds up opens up the fault lines of the systems of representations that ruled over the people.

Immigrants and their Resistance

But Ghosh’s discourse on colonization functions within the narrative through underlining the callous repercussion of invasion, colonization and decolonization. Its politics of little acts of anti-colonial debates work through the alter stories of refugees and their ways/attempts of survival. The text shares the horrors of the partition and the quandary of the refugees with special focus on Bengal partition after the independence. The de- colonial strand is weaved through colonial alter-narration of everyday life, living and survival of the partition refugees. At the heart of *The Hungry Tide* is Morichjhapi, an island in Sundarbans remembered as the site of forcible eviction of ordinary people, who have occupied the land from time to time: starting from the first set of refugees in the 1920’s and then at the time of partition of the subcontinent and as a third wave in 1971, after the Bangladesh war. The authorities wanted to evict these landless people by force. The government saw these people as squatters, and land-grabbers; there was going to be trouble if they were not evicted through some means. So, they hired gangsters on the shores to drive these settlers out. The physical aggression leads to a commotion and then ends in a massacre where plenty of people get killed. The whole story of Morichjhapi is revealed through a series of letter, written by Nirmal, Nilima’s husband, in his efforts to support these poor and landless refugees. This episode develops as subplot in the context of Piyali’s efforts to study the presence of a certain species of Irrawaddy dolphins in the Sunderbans.

Ghosh is indeed making the point of how the colonisation is replaced with that of a new-colonial process where the natives are forced to evict from the only land, they can probably access to for their livelihood. There is a tool of force and imposing from the authorities calling them as intruders and “foreigners”. This element of containment can

be seen in another setting – in a complete different context- in Iris Murdoch’s Booker Prize-winner *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). At the outset, the novel revolves around characters representing the material and spiritual strivings of people within the same social setting. However, a close reading will reveal the colonial tendency of dominion and despotism of the central character which evidently affect the life of another woman, i.e., Mary Hartley Smith. Metaphorically, Mr. Arrowby, the protagonist, and Mrs. Heartley represent the colonial master and the native respectively and his 'offers' made before her, resemble the present-day neo-colonial development agenda aggressively pursued by states, which leave millions of ordinary men and women houseless and hopeless for the rest of their lives. At the textual level, the narration remains silent with regard to the reason behind Mrs. Heartley and her husband's decision to leave for Australia, but one can argue that the unsettlement of the family is solely due to the intervention of the colonial master.

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The Neocolonial Master

The setting of the plot is a sea-side village where Mr. Charles Arrowby decides to spend his retirement life. His chance meeting up with Heartley, which he calls as “the oddest coincidence” re-casts his life and thereafter he is led by the question whether she is happy in her married life. As Heartley being his childhood sweetheart, he does not stop there and concludes, without any reason, that she should be offered a new life. The self-assessment of himself as a saviour of her, drive him to intrude upon her private and familial life, creating disturbances, but rationalised by himself through rhetoric such as [it is an] “Incredible luck to meet her again”, “it’s the hand of destiny”; “she’s had such an unhappy life, it is as if she has prayed for me and I have come”; “I will rescue her make her happy for whatever time remains” etc. (*The Sea, The Sea*: 1978,191).

This self-justification of Mr. Arrowby reminds us of Mistah Kurtz, the enigmatic and unforgettable Ivory agent in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, who represents the Europe's wish for men with “higher intelligence, wide

sympathies and singleness of purpose” and also a messenger of “pity and science and progress” (Heart of Darkness, p. 47). His view of himself as a master of everything at the Central Station is reflected in his exhortations “My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river”. “The colonial project”, writes Hiddleston, “involves the literal process of entering into a foreign territory and assuming control of its society and... on a more conceptual level, the post facto promulgation of a cultural ideology that justifies the colonizer's presence on the basis of his superior knowledge and “civilization”¹.

The violence Kurtz unleashed on the natives to safeguard his position makes the villagers even reluctant to speak of the colonial. The form of violence is physical in the African inner station, but psychological at the 'Shruff End', the sea-facing house owned by Mr. Arrowby who decide to keep her under his control in at his house. Despite her repeated crying, he felt he was right and this “temporary imprisonment”, would act as 'a psychological cure' which would result in she preferring to live the rest of her life with him. In the pretext of offering freedom and hope, what the master does is an act of despotism, which to use a phrase from Bhabha, would be the “doubleness of colonisation”. With this act of violence, 'Shruff End', the sea-facing house, transforms into another inner station, proving what the villagers believed - 'Shruff' meant 'black'; meaning house of blackness or house of darkness; and Mr. Arrowby completely transforms into another Kurtz: One, the uncanny symbol of freedom and hope for Heartley and the other a sly symbol of civilization in the African forests.

The Anachronism

The colonial masters and their presence often seem to be matter of 'out of time and context' which reveal the contradiction within themselves and their civilizational plans just as the word 'Kurtz' meant 'short in German', but “he looked at least seven feet long”². In the case of Mr. Arrowby, the renowned theatre director's presence, both literally and

symbolically, in a dark room near the sea is a case of anachronism, as his offer of help and freedom for Heartley is completely refuted by herself as she realises his 'progressive plan' fails to fit to the social and familial setting already in place. At one instance, he even tells Titus, the estranged son of Heartley, “I want to be your father, I want you, to be my son, whatever happens” (p. 309). Despite his self-projection of himself as leading a solitary life with his simple means of life and eating vegetable dishes in his oil lamp-lit house, his thoughts conspicuously contradict his hermit-like living. Moreover, as a man who loves the emptiness of the sea side village and its lack of basic amenities, he should not be concerned by the absence of any letters from his well-wishers, but which he fails. His expectations are too high, despite he thinks of redeeming his own notorious past as a power-hungry theatre director.

Modern symbols of colonial appropriation

Referring to the offering of the Bible to the natives, Bhabha cites a useful term 'Einstellung', a German word, which meant a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition³ etc. He feels this process of displacement precedes any colonial appropriation and at the end, here, the Bible becomes an object of colonial appropriation. Likewise, Mr. Arrowby's offer of freedom and hope is yet another symbol of colonial appropriation just as Marlowe stands for civilization. Mr. Arrowby expands himself to be an authority over her, but she manages to escape from his direct assault/impact, but sacrifices her place of settlement. In other words, the master succeeds in unsettling the native in his efforts of colonisation. So she leaves the sea side village and settles in another country along with her husband while Mr. Arrowby remains in his house of darkness.

The Greek's complex relation with the sea, and their perception of sea as 'a place of no return' and 'an away place'⁴ appear to be

1 Jane Hiddleston, Understanding Postcolonialism (2009) Acumen Publishing Ltd. Durham.

2 Heart of Darkness, P.107

3 Cited in Homi K. Bhabha, J Derrida, Dissemination, Barbara Johnson (trans.) Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1980)

4 Lindenlauf, Astrid. “The Sea as a Place of no Return”, in World Archaeology Vol. 35(3):416-

contradicting to the colonial tendencies of looking at sea as a commodity meant for profit. Moreover, when the states perform the role of patron of international capitalism, their unethical 'developmental' plans become symbol of yet another colonial appropriation. Sartre stands out as the Western Marxist who was most conspicuously involved in the politics of the anti-colonial movements, both in terms of a developing preoccupation with resistance to colonialism in his work and in his own personal political activism. Sartre find three specific reasons or context to the issue of colonialism: First, 'problem of... colonisation is a question of providing, by means of judicious reforms, food for nine million people'. The second, the problem is social: the numbers of schools and doctors must be greatly increased; and third, the problem is psychological: The Algerians have developed an inferiority complex with regard to his masters and he concludes: 'if he eats enough to satisfy his hunger, if he has work and can read, he will no longer suffer the shame of being sub-human and we will rediscover that old Franco-Muslim fraternity.

In short, Colonialism, cleverly appropriates the native and contains its inherent features, acquired over generations. Thus, as Fanon argues, the appropriation and domination of the native, through various means have benefited the colonial masters which continue even today. Only a process of decolonisation will liberate the third world populations from the historical clutches of imperialism.

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