

# Colonialism – A Psycho-Affecting Discourse

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**Abstract:** *‘Colonialism’ is usually viewed negatively and the term evokes images of persecution, exploitation, enslavement, distortion of indigenous culture, way of thinking and jingoistic and racist attitude. Viewed from psychological perspective, colonial texts serve as a psycho-affecting discourse as they shape the minds and disposition of the natives to a great extent and thus very often deliberately intend to draw allegiance of the natives by distorting indigenous culture and history and misinterpreting the natives as primitives, devoid of civilization. This paper aims at making a critical approach to some prominent colonial writers who wrote with first hand experience of life, cultures, rituals, languages and minds of the Subcontinent, and showing how they distorted these phenomena in their texts. The specialty of this paper lies in the juxtaposition of colonial discourse with psychoanalysis.*

“Reading is seen as fundamentally a re-creation of identity by means of a ‘transactive’ relation between reader and text” (Newton 142) and, as Barthes has freed text from author’s grip by declaring his death in his canonical writing, *Death of the Author*, now as such, becoming a possession of authority, which obviously refers to reader, it radically deserves an analytical reading in relation to the identity–structure of reader. Post-structuralist criticism, swept by Derrida and Lacanian psychoanalysis, encourages readers to construe colonial and postcolonial texts differently. Of all the aspects of colonial study, one that lies in the focus of this paper is, how the British, by ambition or luck, turned rulers from traders and how through little effort and 'fortuitous circumstances' held the sovereignty of the subcontinent and kept the flag of the British Raj hoisting for nearly two centuries. Hence, the ambiguity emerging out of these queries remains here a crucial incentive to uncover the repressed influences exercised by some of colonial text upon the unconscious, which itself articulates a discourse of the ‘other’.

If seen psycho-analytically, colonialism stems from Nietzschean conception of “will-to-power,” that animated the European’s irrepressible desire to dominate over rest of the world. It, though metonymically articulating a civilizing discourse,

plays the role of the psycho-affecting force that empties the natives' brain of all forms and contents and distorts, disfigures and destroys the rooted mindset and succeeds, to a considerable extent, in estranging him from his past and history. It convinces the natives if the colonizers are to leave they will fall back to barbarism, darkness and illiteracy. Thus narcissistic colonialism defies the self of the natives and it develops their own self. The colonizers define their 'self' with contrasted representations of 'other' that occur across a wide variety of literary and cultural texts and the interaction existing between the colonizers and the 'other' is mostly traumatic as the later are "rendered captive by economic, psychological, social and legal subordination as well as by physical force" (Herman 74) .

Living under the direct domination, the 'other' develop an acute sense of captivity which brings them into prolonged contact with the colonizers and creates a special type of relationship, one of coercive control that sets the both poles apart "as in the case of prisoners and hostages, or by combination of force, intimidation and enticement, as in the case of religious cult members, battered women and abused children" (ibid 74-75). As such the natives look upon the colonizers as perpetrators and themselves as victims whose psychology is projected by the actions and beliefs of the latter. The perpetrators always produce a sort of cocoon around themselves by showing contempt to those who seek to understand them and so they must not volunteer to be studied. In this connection, Octave Mannoni asserts, "The Europeans living in the colonial territories did not generally include those who had the power to decide on a policy of colonization-or of decolonization- nor even those who had the most to gain from such a policy" (86). This disposition is the outcome of the colonizers' superiority complex that allures them to think or, at least, believe that they can do only good to the colonized " converting to the true faith, nursing the sick, feeding the hungry, teaching the ignorant" in a word, bringing the advantages of civilization(ibid,86). Being instigated by such prejudice they tend to disregard the identity of the natives and separate themselves from the latter with a mask of inscrutability, mystery and inaccessibility which generates a relation of submission and coercion between them, though ironically, they publish their ideology as universalism, that is, all men are equal, an alternative to racialism.

On the part of the colonizers, they, as perpetrators, ensure their foremost goal and it appears to be the enslavement of their victims, that is, the natives through exercising despotic control over every aspect of their life. While exerting this enterprise, the colonizers are not satisfied with simple compliance; they rather appear to have a psychological need to justify their despotism and for this they

need the natives' affirmation. Therefore, they relentlessly demand from the natives professions of respect, gratitude or even love. In doing so like perpetrators, the colonizers apply some apparatuses such as police, army, law court and many others like these to generate an atmosphere of constant fear that tends to perpetuate submission of the natives. Violence or threat of death, which is a universal method of terror, is the last resort to make the colonized realize that the colonizers are omnipotent, and resistance on the part of the natives is futile and they will survive only through absolute compliance. Thus they instill in the colonized not only fear but also a disposition of gratitude for being allowed to live.

In connection with the above delineation, New historicist approach exhibits that Prospero, in *The Tempest* (1623), claims gratitude, a usual and lurid attempt to legitimize his colonial interference, from Caliban for teaching him language though in so doing he has ousted the latter's mother and occupied her island. He also firmly claims gratitude from snobbish Ariel as his savior. He says, "It was mine art, when I arrived and heard thee that made gape/ The pine, and let thee out (*The Tempest*, 40). Such claim serves as an attempt to deconstruct the natives' logocentric adherence to their self identity. Caliban has his own substantive identity and sense of belonging which inspires him to challenge the colonial authority of Prospero. True to say, "One's cultural identity- the self concept of a person who belongs to a particular cultural group, has a powerful effect on one's intercultural communication" (Lustig 3). Cultural identity develops an invariable sense of membership in a particular traditions, heritage, language, religion, ancestry, aesthetics, pattern of thinking and social structures. It provides him with an impetus to produce a concrete stand against foreign domination. Hence, out of fear of being challenged, the colonizers deliberately plan to project a strategy to split up the sense of self-identity of the natives.

In the same vein, regarding the demand of the colonizers George Orwell gives voice to the totalitarian mind in *Nineteen Eighty four* (1949):

We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrendered to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us; so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely heart and soul. (210)

Thus a staunch desire for total control over the natives is the typical idiosyncrasy that the colonizers never intend to spare at any cost. With overwhelming force they render the natives helpless as Caliban is rendered subservient to the books of magic, a vivid hardware of colonialism, of Prospero who, with the help of these hardwires, creates a feeling of "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control and threat of annihilation" in his subordinate's mind (Herman 33). Intensification of such impulse traumatizes Caliban. Metaphorically interpreted, in the face of such practice, the natives are traumatized and the benefit of this process goes to the colonizers because the traumatized "may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion" (ibid 34). Hence, they fail sternly to procreate determinism or a counter discourse to fight back, and preferring to solitude they alienate themselves and alienation from the home politics paves the way for desired and undisrupted colonial hegemony. Very often internal dissensions generate alienations among the members of a race; for example, if we look back to the history of the emergence of the English East India Company as the ruler in the subcontinent it may be obviously viewed how the native authority was destabilized and frequently challenged by the 'intense court factionalism' and communal clash between the Hindus and the Muslims and how deliberately the European merchants manipulated these follies and frailties for their privilege.

Portrayal of psychograph of the 'other' draws the readers' attention to the prejudice and narcissism complex with which the colonist writers have projected the image of 'other'. In this connection, Said's *Orientalism* (1978) appeared as an etymological intervention in the fraught and distraught enterprise of the white texts, dealing with the colonial encounter and malignant project of degrading the 'others'. Racism, an inevitable outcome of the colonizing mission, constructs the non-white as a devious other through a reinforcement of political and cultural centrality of the West. A handful of white writers who are commonly renowned as anti imperialist such as George Orwell, E.M. Forster, John Masters, Paul Scott and a few others have also maintained their prejudice against the East with a deliberate malice. After having a close perusal of *Burmese Days* (1934) if we think Orwell to be an anti imperialist it will be misleading. Orwell's hatred of British imperial enterprise in the then Burma, now Myanmar, may also be misleading. The words that Orwell concedes seem to contradict which I have just said about him. To be sure, in his words, "I was in the Indian Police five years, and by the end of that time I hated the imperialism I was serving ... I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience"(Zaman 126). Orwell's hatred for imperialism does not, of course, lend weight to the view that the colonized are at

his favor, but true, he rather concedes that the colonizers have the right to be "a little disagreeable" (Orwell 32). Though all his protagonists are fired with, not only by social and political motives, but by frustrated passion, it is never safe for us to think that they are in favor of the colonized. This passion of frustration gears up Orwell's creativity. Flory in *Burmese Days* (1934) being driven by frustration ultimately comes across the truth that colonizing mission is a money making enterprise, but despite this the novel ends with a distinct impression that the Burmese with all their uncouth dispositions are not able to form self-government.

With the advent of colonialism native culture gets adulterated owing to the hybridization. There develops an inter-cultural atmosphere. Constant interaction between the natives and the colonizers challenges the absoluteness of indigenous culture. Sense of security, comfort and predictability which characterizes communication with culturally similar people and "The greater the degree of inter-culturalness, the greater the loss of predictability and certainty. Assurances about the accuracy of interpretations of verbal and non-verbal messages are lost" (Lustig 119). This inter-cultural amalgamation is mostly responsible to turn India a 'formless mass' in Forster's *A Passage to India*. Hysteria undergone by Adela Quested in the Marabar Caves is an outcome of this loss of sense of security, comfort and absoluteness. Similarly, though Aziz is a strong character, he is totally unpredictable and "His name runs the gamut from "A" to "Z" as if Forster intended that he should encompass essentially all humanity" (Kart 122) but still he is all anomalies emerged out of an unequal juncture between heterogeneous cultural trends.

Thus a dilemma, 'turn white or disappear', always confronts Orwell who seems to maintain belief that the Burmese never understand the meaning of self-government. Hence, Orwell is a critic of imperialism, as "he is a victim of imperialism, a captive of its by-products, of isolation and moral corruption and of its code of behavior" (Zaman 101). Like a typical and stereotyped colonial writer Orwell's tireless attempt to produce ambivalence through projecting "a sense of cultural inferiority instilled by cultural indoctrination" (Thieme 169). His U Po Kyin is a mimic man embraced by colonial hegemony and Dr. Veraswami incarnates a spokesman of British imperialism. The predicament of Flory interprets Orwell's compassionate and authorial convictions that the imperialists may be in some occasions disagreeable but they are also sufferers. Suffering on the part of the colonized is to him expiation and to all extent justifiable while it is undeserving in the case of the colonizers. That is, ten to one, why U Po Kyin's

desperate attempt of occupying a position in the club has been seen by Orwell as the emergence of bureaucracy that plagues the human conscience of the twentieth century world. Rudyard Kipling, a staunch chauvinist, asks the colonized to take up the 'Whiteman's Burden' as he convicts that West is to be eulogized and appreciated because of its civilizing mission. Actually, colonialist texts serve as a software that aims at formatting the pattern of thinking and developing false consciousness among the colonized and "The danger of 'false consciousness' nowadays is not that it cannot grasp an absolute unchanging reality, but rather that it obstructs comprehension of a reality which is the outcome of constant reorganization of the mental processes which make up our worlds" (Mannheim 84).

True, colonial texts serve as a kind of desperate attempt to degrade and distort and level 'other' with primitivism and incarnate the Europeans with superior qualities, contrasted against so called primitivism of the colonized. They tend to convince the colonized that they intend to enliven the primitive 'other' who is dead set against colonialism, though it is deadly untrue. These colonial texts deliberately evade the truth that race for cheap raw materials for the development of industries in Europe in the nineteenth and the first half of twentieth centuries led the colonizers to the bitter struggle for colonies and spheres of influence throughout the world. Even slave trade that, according to Marx, was a source of primitive accumulation of capital for European and US industries by the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries stimulated the colonizers to suppress, exploit and persecute the 'other'. Exercise of brutality in Congo has been depicted by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* as a justifiable and benevolent enterprise upon the so called uncivilized natives. Conrad has depicted the culture of the natives as primitivism and he does never concede that the colonized may have their indigenous culture which is only of their own and it is different; it is not a lack of culture or savagery. And to be enlightened they need to be slaves to their European master Kurtz but ironically he does not mention the historical truth which, according to Solodovnikov:

lies in the fact that slavery has contributed to the development and enrichment of many cities in West Europe and America: Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, London and Manchester in England, Nantes, la Rochelle and Rouen in France, Amsterdam in Holland, Boston, Charlestone, New Orleans, New York in the USA and many other cities owe their wealth to slavery. (11)

Thus colonial texts act as an exploitative imposition upon the colonized with a deliberate intention to deconstruct their selves and create multiple selves, setting them face to face, perplexed with loss of identity and reconstruct them with the ilogies and isms of colonizers. The natives lose the true selves and embrace the false selves, a process leading to mimicry. They also bring about a cultural negotiation between West and East and gradually succeed in making the natives believe that it is their divine right to organize the natives' pattern of projecting their image. They misinterpret the history and misrepresent the native rulers as "drunkards, fools, but mostly children, they are entirely insulated from the world outside" (Punter, 51). Such distortion of history causes a kind of nervousness or neurosis or sense of passivity, which, according to Adler, is exploited by the colonizers to enslave the colonized. In the words of Lewis Way, "Neurosis, of course, is not the only type of adaptive failure possible, Adler characterized it as passive type of failure where the person seeks to dominate by exploiting weakness and illness" (132). Thus the loss of adaptability allures the colonized to 'take up the white man's burden' and, to a great extent, colonial texts serve as a powerful weapon for the implementation of the colonizers' ironically civilizing mission.

Even long after the completion of decolonization, Neo-colonialism is still rampant because of dubious role of the post colonial bourgeois intellectuals who tend to be confined in the purse of the capitalists. In connection with the behavioral standpoint, these so called intellectuals act like psychotherapists, the progenies, a formulated version, equipped with the discourse of colonizers, overtly inheriting their instinct of superficiality and showy heritage of the way of thinking and self-positioning. To be sure, the job of the intellectuals is to annoy the capitalists and compel them for the equal distribution of wealth among those who are degraded to the level of 'factory of labor', not human beings with concrete self. But unfortunately, these mimic men rather lull the exploiters with bourgeois discourse and in this respect, their writings enkindle the interest of the colonizing powers and consequently unrest, sedition, civil war, military coup, monopoly of trades and commerce by a particular privileged class and injustice are still rampant in different parts of the world which were once the colonies of the Europeans. And Chinua Achebe, whose writings obviously appear to be a counter discourse, has powerfully depicted all these by-products of Neo-colonialism in his trilogy and in one of his famous novels, *Anthills of the Savannah*.

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