

Colonization From Colonizers' Perspective: A Reading Of "Shooting An Elephant"**B. Silviya**

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Abstract

The present paper attempts a study of identity crisis that is evident in the text "Shooting an Elephant". The paper tries to give the dual perspectives of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as presented in the text. It also portrays the concept of hegemony is under subject of change in the case of the colonizer. The misrepresentation of the voiceless and the subaltern, and the injustice shown to them have also been meticulously documented.

Keywords: Identity, Hegemony, Subaltern, Colonizer.**Introduction**

The paper attempts to portray the identity crisis of the colonizer who stuck up between the white supremacy power and the colonized people. Being a colonizer he could neither stand for the British people nor support for the Burmese people. In case of the Burmese people, they do not have the feeling of being colonized instead they show their liberation especially towards the police officers, who have to protect or have dominant over colonized. European women are also insulted by these Burmese people as they spit betel juice over their dresses. The state of the elephant after it gone 'must' causes severe destruction to the native people and also it had killed a black Dravidian coolie.

In this text, the life of a man is considered lower than the life of the elephant. Orwell is in the critical situation that he is forced to shoot the elephant without his will but to maintain the conventional image of the colonizer. The conventional colonizer has the power in his hands also he could not fool the hundreds of people behind him who followed with great expectation of having full fun on seeing the elephant get shot and also to take the meat, home. There is no one to speak for the dead person simply because he is a Dravidian coolie.

Orwell makes up his mind that he did not want to justify his act of killing the elephant to the mahout as because he is powerless and also he could not do anything against the power. Orwell was thankful to that coolie as he has saved his position for giving him a reason to kill the elephant. Thus Orwell justifies his act of killing the elephant.

Identity Crisis:

In the text “Shooting an Elephant”, the identity of the West is scorned by the East. The west is always seen as or related with the concept of hegemony. Hegemony to Gramsci, is the “cultural, moral and ideological” leadership of a group over allied and subaltern groups. In the text Orwell represents the colonizer, the dominating class and the people of Burmese represent the colonized, the subaltern. The colonizer is mocked by the Burmese people and he is treated as a clown by the colonized. The colonizer feels that he has been considered important for the only time and that is to be hated by a large number of people that too in the east. The colonizer takes this in a positive way by saying that he is given importance at least in this way. The colonizer takes this in a positive way by saying that he is given importance at least in this way. He puts

forth that “I was hated by large numbers of people the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this happen to mine”(19).

Though the colonized people do not have the courage to protest, they spit betel juice over the European women as a mark of protesting or showing their resistance. Here the European women are not considered as the supreme power but they are treated as their counterparts. In case of women, they are always treated as the subaltern whatever class, category or caste they belong to. The colonizers are used to mocked at or insulted wherever they go.

Being a police officer, Orwell is their ultimate target. The colonized people always find a chance to taunt him. Here, the shift of power is realized when the colonizer is being colonized by the colonized people. Wherever the colonizer goes he gets humiliated. It is believed widely that the hegemonic power or the supremacy i.e the west rule over the east. However, here the east takes control over the west at a safer distance. That is by noting down the coward people in the colonizers who do not have the audacity to fight back, there the Burmese raise their voice again not for them, but to have an ultimate fun by ridiculing them.

The priests are often associated with sacred and calmness but here they are completely different. They also behave like the ordinary Burmese people by making fun of the colonizers. The priests come out of their place to streets and they deride these colonizers. It is a sad reality that the priests have come down to ridicule their colonizers instead of sticking to their personality. Here the conventional images of the priests are completely collapsed.

Orwell confesses secretly that he is on the side of the Burmese people and he is against their oppressors. He brings out the sad picture of the prisoners and their treatment in the prison.

Unfortunately, he stuck between the hatred of the empire he serves and the anger against the Burmese people. The Burmese are portrayed as “evil spirited little beasts”(19). They are believed to possess the barbaric quality. The hegemonic identity is thus shaken here. Being a white man he could not take the supremacy power in his hand, instead he is over ruled by the “little beasts”(19). Each and every Anglo-Indian official who is working in Burmese faces such humiliations in their day-to-day life by the Burmese people.

Orwell is about to narrate a tiny incident in an elaborate manner. He hears a piece of news on a fine morning that an elephant has gone out of its control or it turned “must”. In this situation Orwell has to behave like a matured person to solve the chaos that has risen by the elephant. Being a police officer he has to save the lives of people from the mad elephant. According to him, his rifle is too small to kill such a big elephant. Anyway he is confident that surely the sound from the rifle will scare the elephant. The elephant which has turned “must” has caused many damage to the properties, animals and also to the people. Later he talks about the failure of the authentic information in the east. He says, “a story always sounds clear enough at distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes”(20).

Orwell then describes an incident about “a coringhee coolie” who has been killed by the elephant. He portrayed the laid corpse looked devilish. Now after seeing the corpse of the Indian Black Dravidian coolie Orwell gets terrified. He sends his pony back because if it gets out of control on seeing the elephant he would get wounded. So he intelligently sends his pony. Then he sends for “an elephant rifle”. It shows that even being a police officer he was not given a proper rifle to face such circumstances. He is treated as dunce even by his own people. So the Burmese confidently mock at or ridiculing these police officers without any fear. Moreover

Orwell is only 19 years old and he is too young to handle such kind of incidents. Anyhow he is brave enough to face the elephant. It is not because that he is much courageous but because it is the chance he has in his hands to prove the natives and his own people that he is capable of being a police officer and also if he faces it more bravely then he could gain respect from these Burmese then onwards.

The Burmese people are more excited and they had fun on watching Orwell's reaction to the situation. The crowd that followed him fixate him in a critical position. He is in a dilemma whether to shoot the elephant and satisfy the curious eyes of the "yellow faces" or think of the mahout who is the owner of the elephant. He is also in a dilemma whether to leave the place as because the elephant now is eating without giving any disturbance to the public. He feels that now killing the elephant would be like destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery.

Being a leading actor following the crowd behind him, he is under the position 'to behave like a sahib'. "A sahib has got to act like a sahib". The conventional image of the 'sahib' is making him to kill the elephant. Though the Burmese did not like him, he was made worth watching because of the magical rifle in his hands. He is in a crisis that he has to do what the 'natives' expect of him.

However he is still in a dilemma either to shoot or not to shoot the elephant. He thinks of all the possibilities of what might happen if he shoots the elephant. If the elephant is left alive it could earn money for his owner or the mahout. But if it is dead the life of the mahout would lead to a big question mark. He then looks at the watchful yellow faces behind. He is not actually frightened but he thinks of, if his shooting goes wrong then he would be like the grinning corpse

of the Indian. “A white man mustn’t be frightened in front of “natives”; and so, in general he isn’t frightened”(22).

Finally he kills the elephant after several shots. He could not wait for the elephant to die, so he left the place. He then heard that it took half an hour for the elephant to die. It seems that it is not easy to destroy the nature that easily. The Burmese who waited for the elephant to die took its flesh and left to the bones by afternoon.

Conclusion:

The mahout, owner of the elephant, though he is furious he could do nothing as because he is an Indian. The debate goes within the Europeans and their opinions were divided. The elder people appreciated his act of bravery and timely sense but the younger opposed and criticized him for killing the elephant just because it killed a man that too a coolie. To them the elephant’s life is more important than the life of “damn Coringhee coolie”(24). Orwell is glad and thankful to the coolie that he gave him the valid reason for killing the elephant. He justifies his act to himself that he did it by himself to avoid looking a fool in front of the ‘natives’ hereafter.

Works Cited:

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