

Amalgam of Black and White: An Ambivalent Study of Shooting an Elephant

Sidra Ahmad¹, Ubaidullah Abid Qazi²

¹Lecturer, Department of English, FUSST, Foundation University Islamabad.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, FUSST, Foundation University Islamabad.

Correspondence: sidra.ahmad@fui.edu.pk¹

ABSTRACT

Study Background: Shooting an Elephant is a story of an elephant who had gone wild and started destroying and engulfing the precious items of the locals in the town of Burma. Though it was not new for the Burmese as they have been stripped off and made powerless by the whites. They were worried about the situation and to test the dominating power of the whites they approached Orwell which resulted in the ambivalent nature of Orwell at multiple events.

Aim of the Study: The main aim of the study is to expose the ambivalent nature of Orwell when he is torn between what to do and what not to do so that he shouldn't be laughed at. The researchers have also focused on Said model of Orientalism to determine the concept of self/other as experienced by Orwell and the Burmese population. Bhabhian theory of ambivalence along with the Said's model of Orientalism is taken as groundwork of the study.

Methodology: Textual analysis is done to identify the concept of self/other. The text is read multiple times to decode the meaning of different words and finally it is established that Orwell does not want to kill the elephant but just to please the whites and to exhibit the dominance over the Burmese he had to kill the elephant just to manifest the idea that "if a person's skin were light enough to "pass" as White then he or she was more than likely admitted into the society." (Sanford, 2018, p.38).

Findings & Conclusion: It is clear by the thorough study of the text that when the elephant was destroying and demolishing the homes and surroundings, the colonized were not taking any interest which shows that the colonized were not interested in this oppression after getting used to it but when he was going to be shot, they were very glad because it represents that the butcherly British or the colonizers are declining and weakening and soon will be wiped off from Burma.

Keywords: Ambivalence, Postcolonial, Hybridity, Imperialism.

Introduction

Ambivalence is a fundamental concept of postcolonialism and is connected with the phenomenon of indecisiveness. The theory proposed by Homi. K. Bhabha explains ambivalence as a complicated or obscure mixture of relations or feelings between a colonizer and a colonized. It is an amalgam of hatred,

Article History

Received:
April 30, 2023

Revised:
June 19, 2023

Accepted:
June 26, 2023

Published:
June 30, 2023

disgust, attention, and fascination. According to Bhabha (1994), “ambivalence is the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination.” (p. 112). The connection between the two entities is uncertain or doubtful and serves as a mixed sort of contract between the two as the natives can never be in a state of conflict with the colonizer because of the dominion control on the part of the colonizers. We cannot simply say that the colonial discourse purely revolves around the subject of hidden schemes or agendas resulting in alienation. According to Bhabha (1994), “The objective of ‘colonial discourse’ is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.” (p.70). The bond between the colonizer and the colonized is so perplexing that they are expected to act and reflect like the colonizers. As Frantz Fanon states in *Black Skin White Mask* (1967), “The more he rejects his blackness and bush, the whiter he will become” (p.3). The real issue with ambivalence is that the natives are supposed to impersonate the masters but in doing so they end up being the simulacrum of a mime which is exactly the Bhabhian approach that the colonized should not be a facsimile of the masters as it would be an alarming and dangerous for the white man.

Statement of Problem

Ambivalence and identity crisis are the terms that are used collectively when interpreting a postcolonial text. The complication emerges when a character remains perplexed and comes out with the amalgam of heterogeneous identities. The study will examine the concept of ambivalence in the essay *Shooting an Elephant* and Orwell’s failed attempt at being a mimic man. The study will also delve into the inconsistent mindset of Orwell on various occasions and also bring into focus the fascism of the whites towards the Burmese.

Literature Review

Muhammad Sarwar Alam in the article “*Orwell’s Shooting an Elephant*”: *Reflections on Imperialism and Neo Imperialism* defines imperialism as an extreme mode of display of pride, barbarity, and the bluntness acquired by any nation. As Michael Parenti states, “By imperialism, I mean the process whereby the dominant politico-economic interests of one nation expropriate for their own enrichment the land, labor, raw materials and markets of another people” The works of Orwell made him an established figure in the world of writings. As Orwell served for about five years and he had availed himself the maximum chance of monitoring and examining the workings of the colonizer and the colonized from a close quarter. The essay is a reflection of different savage, merciless, and inhuman stages of imperialism. The Elephant and the British officer simultaneously act as a double agent. In contrast with the British police officer, the elephant, and the Burmese population plays an awful role. The elephant represents the “stricken, shrunken, immensely old” countries that have been plundered and occupied by the power of imperialism, and the Burmese at the same time act as a helpless and powerless tool who cannot fight for their rights, or maybe they are immune to the idea of imperialism. According to Alam, (2006) “the once powerful elephant is reduced to ‘senility’ by the bullets just as the imperial colonies with superior technology dominate the countries like India” (p.56). The ‘great beast’ meaning both the elephant and the countries it represents, becomes “powerless to move and yet powerless to die” under the hands of the white man.

Volkan Sari’s article *From George Orwell’s Shooting an Elephant to Civilized Evil of Literature: Imperialism talks about evil and ugly*. According to Sari, one of the most talked about themes in literary writings is the discourse about unpleasant, corrupt, and monstrous and all these titles are used for the colonized. As Cambridge Dictionary defines and states, “Evil means, as a noun, morally bad, cruel or very unpleasant, and the condition of being immoral, cruel, or bad, or an act of this type” (p. 12). According to Sari, all these terms are the substitute for authority and direct territorial acquisitions. The essay highlights the idea that how power or direct territorial rule affects a nation. Not only the oppressors but the oppressed are affected by the evils of dirty work are the targets, and both sets of people are affected (a dilemma of which people are not sure and cannot understand). According to Volkan Sari,(2020) Orwell experiences hate from the local Burmese because he belonged to the police and is the

representative of the police enjoying freedom, and independence from every aspect whereas the Burmese are silenced on the very question of freedom. The Burmese are justified in hating the British imperial police as they have robbed them of their social, religious, and political rights and freedom. As noted by Sari the Burmese were so helpless that could not do anything because they have been made voiceless by the imperial rule they cannot stand on their own and cannot raise their voice so far that matter they were made suppressed and oppressed and give vent to their feelings, the Burmese had no other choice except to ridicule the women when they were not able to take any position or cannot counter back. Sari quoted Orwell, “No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress” (p.13)

Sari questions after looking at the oppressors and the oppressed that what would have happened when those Burmese were not ruled by the British and the European woman was a traveler. According to Sari the game of cruelty, clash, brutality or disturbance is another common aspect and the text seems to be echoing examples of these sorts. The locals when they are made voiceless or mute, they had no other option other than to be violent. As Sari (2020) quoted Orwell and writes, “As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so” (p. 13). For Sari, the sole purpose of imperialism is to threaten the colonized. It led the Burmese to question their position in society as the oppressed and of the British as the oppressors and of the undeniable fact that the oppressors or the elements of imperialism as the British in the essay or story are unbeatable and cannot be questioned which led to the psychological violence. As Sari (2020) writes, “Imperialism becomes an important part of evil in literature” (13).

Aljendro Del Castillo Garza writes in *Behind the Act of Shooting an Elephant* that the working of the state determines the performance of its inhabitants. The story *Shooting an Elephant* is an epitome example of Althusser’s concept of State Apparatuses. One of the drawbacks of settlements or making colonies is the bitterness or grudge found in the natives for the tyrant or the white man because of occupying the best places and securing top positions for themselves constituting or creating an awkward class order. As expressed, by Orwell and quoted by Castillo in the beginning, “Burmese did not seem to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans” (p.1). The disagreement the storyteller faces while living close to the Burmese is based on a personal, conscientious, principled and authentic zone. Garza is of the view that in the larger context, Orwell does not agree with the process of colonization on the part of the British, on another level, he does not want to look like a joker or a comic figure and lastly, he cannot agree more on the death of an elephant. The point he is trying to make is that all the clashes are because of the formerly introduced philosophies or dogmas. Unfortunately, Orwell served the empire which he is not willing to serve as he worked closely with the British so he was well-informed of the dirty work of the Empire. As quoted by Garza (2020), “Theoretically and secretly, of course- I was all for the Burmese and all against the oppressors, the British” (p.2) Orwell tried to find out the reasons for the working of the empire he hated but was only able to make out that, “I was young and ill-educated and I had to think out my problems in the utter silence that are imposed on every Englishman in the East” (p.2). The muteness or hush on the part of Orwell confers him in the role of an oppressed. The net result is “both the Burmese and the Englishman were oppressed by a superior power- the British empire” (p. 2).

Yigit Sunbal in the article *Death of imperialism in George Orwell’s Shooting an Elephant* talks about the future of the elephant. According to Sunbal, the future of the elephant is linked with the future of the empire. As the British Empire is of no use to the Burmese and has never done anything fruitful for the natives, the same goes for the elephant, when the elephant was alive, it was useless for the Burmese but when it was shot, it became precious and cherished by everyone but with the death of the heavenly creature, the British empire too began to smash and annihilate. As Yigit (2021) commented when the elephant was dying slowly, “settling upon its shoulders and it collapses for the last time like the elephant” (p.92). As the British empire tried to rise on its own shoulders before rising and settling on its own feet like an elephant but got shattered and crushed. For Sunbal, “The empire is obviously dying for some time” (p.92). The empire elephant metaphor is used to criticize the uselessness of the empire and elephant

as the elephant when he was shot could not rise again in the same way England was getting out of control and losing its control. Sunbal writes, “The owner England in this case, has been out of control and the empire has gone off the rails for some time” (p.92).

Research Gap

Many researchers have explored the work from different angles and perspectives. Some have studied the work through the angle of imperialism, others have taken a look at an essay from the stylistic angle and few types of research have been done taking into account the death of imperialism angle. My study is unique and different in the way that I have studied and analyzed the story by applying two theories as they are interconnected. I have interpreted the story by applying Said's model of Orientalism on the one hand and on the other hand I have tried to explicate and illustrate the essay keeping in mind the Bhabbian approach to ambivalence taking into account the autobiographical aspects as narrated by George Orwell.

Study Objectives

- I. To investigate the challenges faced by George Orwell in *Shooting an Elephant* when he is acting as a mimic man.
- II. To analyze the idea of self/other through the lens of Edward Said in *Shooting an Elephant*.

Research Methodology

Research is a term that is widely used for critical inquiry or investigation of something new. It focuses on the idea of something novelty that has never been done before. As Nicholas Williams (2019) pointed out in the book *Research Methods the basic* is that “Research is a very general term for an activity that involves finding out, in a more or less systematic way, things you did not know” (p.1). There are many methods of doing research depending upon the area of research. The researcher will adopt two methodologies to carry out the research smoothly. The first approach would be textual analysis. According to Alan Mckee (2001), “Textual analysis is a methodology- a data gathering process for those researches who went to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of”. (p. 3). The textual analysis is one of the techniques applied for the interpretation of any kind of text which is used in almost every analysis related to cultural studies. It is conducted to explore the text in real time. The textual analysis of the essay along with the narrative analysis of the essay will be done to understand the context of the essay. The narrative technique is employed as the essay is the autobiography of Orwell and as stated by Therese Thuv (2023), “Narratives are influential in the sense that it’s easier for the human mind to both interpret, remember and make decisions based on meaningful stories and explanations instead of independent strings of information.” (p-3). The study will be done qualitatively and the researcher will focus on the words, phrases, underlying meanings, surface meanings, and the writing style of George Orwell in the essay to decode the meaning of it. As Strauss & Corbins, 2008, conveys “qualitative research explores meanings and insight in a given situation. (pg.2). Orwell’s ambivalent nature on various occasions and the enigma of torn between two identities will be discussed. The text of the essay is the primary text and different articles, journals and books related to George Orwell are the secondary sources. The interpretation and narration are done taken into account all the primary and sources available.

Analysis

Set in the lower town of Burma, the story is the true depiction of the Burmese culture and the atrocious conduct of the British empire. George Orwell was born in India but relocated to England and worked as a British police officer so he had a chance of observing the British empire and police closely. Working for the British police has given him the position of a most cursed and undesirable creature. The beginning of the story clearly reflects the perception and reaction of the Burmese toward Orwell. As confessed by Orwell, “I was hated by large numbers of people” (p.1). The text of *Shooting an Elephant* seems to be the biography of George Orwell himself. As the Marxist critics say that “Instead of seeing authors as

primarily autonomous 'inspired' individuals whose 'genius' and creative imagination enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts. (p. 107). It was a time when the Burmese were ruled by the British and the dirty tricks and the politics of the British were exposed. Associated with the British empire and identified with the whites and as white, naturally, Orwell was the prime focus of the Burmese society and was the undeniable object of mockery and parody on the part of the Burmese on the grounds of catharsis.

From the reading of the text, we come to know that the narrator was a white man who had closely experienced and studied imperial rule and power. The narrator represents Orwell and his views and opinions. He labeled the imperial powers as cruel which have snatched the identity of the natives to express their superiority over the colonizers. The postcolonial writers are of the view that there is a difference between the life of the natives before the colonial rule and after getting Orientalized. According to the narrator "Imperialism is an evil thing" (p. 1). It has its interests; it is not related to the benefits of the people but the government. According to Said (1993), "Imperialism is a state of mind, fuelled by the arrogance of superiority that could be adopted by any nation irrespective of its geographical location in the world. (p.4). The doctrine of imperialism goes by the principle of making colonies. Said (1993) writes, "The practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (p.122). The perception is to give the snowball kind of effect of making colonies rather than collecting or obtaining them.

Living in Burma and affiliated with the law department as Althusser states "repressive structures" (p.110), Orwell is part of the European machinery that naturally holds the hegemonic power to dictate and manipulate the Burmese. As Barry defines Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as the innate ability to command in other words, we can say that the colonized have been given the direct mandate to rule over them. For Gramsci, "rule is a direct political control, which uses force when necessary" (p. 111), and hegemony as defined by Williams can be abstracted as a "world-view or "class outlook" (p. 111). The narrator is the white man and holds only symbolic authority and figurative power under British rule so he was hated by everybody due to his relations with the colonial rule and being the fundamental component of the colonial rule. As quoted by Mcleod in the book *Beginning postcolonialism*, Bhabha's concept of colonialism, "colonialism is informed by the series of assumptions which aim to legitimate its view of other lands and peoples" (p. 52) He has expressed the attitudes of the natives by saying, "it got badly on my nerves" (p.1)

The text creates and generates an impression of Orwell as a stooge and a mechanical device who can easily be subjugated by the Burmese. The colonized Burmese are so unconventional and vindictive as stated by Bhabha, "The colonized subject is a radically strange creature" (p. 52) that in the aura of colonialism, they act and behave very ridiculously as Bhabha rightly argues, "bizarre and eccentric nature is the cause for both curiosity and concern" (p.52). The Burmese could not think of anything to show contempt and bitterness except to annoy the European women by spitting the juice on them. As Orwell remark, "If a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over them" (p.1). It is the growing frustration and resentment that is accumulating in the natives that provoke them to behave in that way as they find no other medium to vent out. Employed with the British police and working with the whites, Orwell was a constant target for the Burmese, they teased, mocked, and satirized him a great deal and used him as a pendulum or ball moving to and fro by the Burmese. With the social and psychological pressures, they controlled Orwell. They never miss any chance to humiliate him. As he says "As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so." Said (1993) labels them as 'not quite as humans as we are" (p.56). We could see the growing tension between the natives and the rulers. "When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field, the crowd yelled with laughter" and "In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance." (p. 1). According to Edward Said "When the empire writes back, these binary oppositions are deconstructed; when a colonized subject insists on taking up the position of 'self as the creator of knowledge about his or her

own culture, rather than as the subject of that knowledge, these binary oppositions start to fall apart. (p. 156). The conquered are misrepresented and negatively portrayed. They (colonized) had no choice other than to tolerate the ruthless behavior of the colonizer. This provokes them to take revenge on the so-called representatives and filled them with disgust. The non-whites showed their anger by ‘spitting betel juice’ over the dress of the women going into the bazaars. Naturally, every action reacts. The colonized are bound to react in this way to show their hatred but being non-whites, they are generalized everywhere and their activities are shown out of context. According to Said (1993) west considered themselves to be superior, highly in contrast to the east. The negative representations, labels, and activities given to the Burmese make the reader dislike them automatically.

Reading the essay, we come to know that Orwell is in a state of confusion. Being white he wants to maintain his superiority over the Burmese but deep down he does feel for the oppressed Burmese and does feel for their pain which results in hybridity. According to Bhabha, “Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representations.” (p. 227). When he observed the dirty work of the imperial rule, he calls it an ‘evil thing’ and felt hatred for his empire and when he saw the Burmese jeering at the Europeans and hooting insults at the narrator, he thought of driving bayonet into Buddhist priest’s guts. His duplicity can be observed when he observes the bitter attitude of the colonizers and calls them ‘innocent beasts’ which results in the double consciousness of the narrator. According to the postcolonial critics, “Double consciousness is perceiving the world through the consciousness of the colonizer as well as through their vision provided by their native culture. (p.187). Orwell was born in Burma so he got an affinity with the Burmese. “I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British” and “I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts.” (p. 1). This reflects the feelings of the narrator towards both the Burmese and the Britishers. He was in between the devil and the deep blue sea regarding his situation. The feelings of hatred, as well as sympathy, are seen at the same time by Orwell. As Frantz Fanon says in ‘Black Skin, White mask’, “As I began to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro. (Fanon). This also leads to the cultural and social alienation of Orwell from his people. Orwell had a close view of the dirty work of the colonizer and calls it a destructive thing which made him anti-imperial.

As the story is set in Burma which has experienced colonial rule and has come out of the shackles of the British so naturally there is animosity among the Burmese for the British. According to Said (1993) “The history of imperialism is the history of discourses about colonized places.” (p. 156) Despite being white, he is shown as a weak character. The characterization of Orwell is nothing more than a puppet whose strings are being pulled not only by the British but the yellow-cowed-faced Burmese too. As the Europeans were ruling at that time in Burma so they try to show their power or superiority over the colonized. He was used and misused by the conquered and the conqueror.

It indeed is the most authoritative and powerful that wins but in the case of Orwell; it is the black man or the blacks that are winning in the end socially, despite being inferior and reduced to the periphery. As Frantz Fanon questions authority and discussed it in terms of social sovereignty. According to the postcolonial critics “All postcolonial literature begins with an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Europeans.” (p.129).

It is clear from the text that the narrator feels for the non-whites. He states” Anti-European feeling was very bitter.” (p.1). The colonizer suppressed the non-whites in every way that they could and the non-whites had no option other than having the people and the whole of the imperial rule. As imperialism is perceived as dark, strange, and a dirty game in Europe so it has gloomy effects and is believed to be destructive for the non-whites. According to Edward Said (1993) “The west occupies a superior rank while the orient is its ‘other’, in a subservient position.” (p.41). Orwell serves as a part of the imperial rule but deep down he is the tool used both by the British and the Burmese. As the narrator is hated by everybody so he feels alienated from the Burmese who actually sneer at him and the Britishers too who

used him for their purpose. The colonizers are increasing the miseries of the colonized making them powerless and helpless. According to Said (1993) "The colonizers were the center, 'the self'. (p. 186)

The narrator himself calls his work dirty. He was always in a fix either to continue his job or to leave it. This represents his ambivalent nature. At one time he calls them dirty, primitive, and backward and feels for them, and at other times, he is against the oppressors that are Europeans. As he says "I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British." (p.1) This reflects his dual or conflicting nature through the European lens. According to the definition of Bhabha and cited by Ashcroft "The complex mix of attraction and repulsion" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, p. 235) characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

As imperialism is the other name for domination and misuse of power. The colonizer gave harsh treatment to the colonized which even made Orwell repent of being a part of the British police and filled him with guilt. As Fanon says "The history, culture, language, customs, and beliefs of the white colonizers are imposed on the colonized and they are eventually coaxed to consider which creates a sense of inferiority in the colonized subject. (Fanon). The narrator has experienced the cruel or brutal treatment given to the colonized subjects whom he expressed" The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey cowed faces of the long-term convict. The scarred buttocks of the men who had been bogged with bamboo, all oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. (p. 1). Such type of episode can be viewed in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' "The true nature of European philanthropy in the Congo is revealed to Marlow by the chain gang and the 'black shadows of disease and starvation' left to die in the 'greenish gloom', whom he sees at the outer station." (Conrad 32). Abuse of power, evil, and imperialism can be observed at all times where the non-whites are bound to suffer. They had to undergo pain and miseries which are a gift of imperialism. All the harsh treatment given by the colonizer to the colonized made them revengeful and made them ridicule Orwell and the other whites. All the disgust, hatred, and marks of brutality were killing them from the inside. It was growing inside the colonized and exploded differently. According to the postcolonial critics, "These postcolonial discourses articulated the experience of the colonized, rather than the colonizer." (Klages 153).

Throughout the text, we could see the air of violence, fury, and game of power which echoes in the text. The behavior and attitude of both the colonizer and the colonized make the narrator guilty of his work and empire and sometimes he curses himself for being a part of it. As he says "Feelings like these are part of imperialism". There are a lot of contradictions that are observed in the narrator that make him uncomfortable in both cases. He started questioning his so-called military position in Burma which disturbs his ego. He was seen going through psychological trauma either to express his superiority or to make an unethical decision that made him or compel him to leave his job. According to postcolonial critics "One becomes a psychological refugee, in not being able to feel at home even in one's own home." (Nagarajan 187) He says "The sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better." (p. 1)

It is simply a story of an elephant that has gone 'must' and start ravaging the town and bazaars. He got out of control and started causing damage in the town and the Burmese expected Orwell (the white man) to kill the elephant. By the end, Orwell had to maintain his superiority and had to kill the elephant 'to avoid looking a fool' but deep down it is meaningful. As Orwell says "It was a tiny incident that made Orwell see the real nature and dirty face of imperialism. "For Bhabha" The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behaves following a neurotic orientation."

The Elephant is symbolic. It represents 'colonial rule' or colonialism. According to Patrick Brantlinger "Black and dark do serve in the text as equivalences for the savage and unredeemed, the corrupt and degraded...the cruel and atrocious." (Brantlinger 285). The symbol of the elephant can be taken in two ways. First, it represents the 'oppressed Burmese', who are taking their revenge on the colonial or imperial empire for taking out their identity and suffering due to the advent of colonialization, and secondly, it represents the British Empire snatching everything from the Burmese making them 'helpless and powerless to move. 'As Orwell says, "The elephant was ravaging the bazaar," It indicates the

economic and cultural destruction done by the conquered. As imperialism causes damage so Orwell says “It had already destroyed somebody’s bamboo hut, killed a cow, raided some fruit stalls, and devoured the stock.”

The natives, as usual, are represented in the text as less developed and are believed to be cannibals and non-humans. As Edward Said pointed out that the people in the east have developed only physically, they have no intellect and have nothing to do with rationality. When the narrator tries to locate the exact location of the elephant, he was disappointed to know that they did not know about their surroundings even. They are unaware of what is happening around them. As Orwell remarks, “As usual, failed to get any definite information.” (p. 2). As it has become a culture and tradition to represent the natives as animals like a barbarian, dirty, and irrational with no sense of living so in a way they are ‘demonic other’ or ‘exotic other’ (Nagarajan 186). According to Said (1993) Every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost ethnocentric.” (p. 204). The Burmese were unaware and alienated from their surroundings that they even do not know about their happenings. As Orwell says “This is the case in the east; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes.” (p.2). They are stereotyped that the natives are not reliable and call the story a ‘pack of lies

The “death of the black Dravidian Coolie” represents the oppression, subjugation, and exploitation of the Burmese at the hands of the British. This tyranny or harsh treatment also determines the power or authority that the British hold. This also determines that the colonizers have the power to rule and crush the colonized. According to the postcolonial critics “Ethnocentric norms and practices are being promoted by a sleight of hand to this elevated status, and all others correspondingly relegated to a subsidiary, marginalized.” (Barry 127). The killing of the elephant determines the cruel colonizer trying to take away or usurp everything from the colonized. This killing once again shows the ambivalence or duplicity of Orwell. He is seen tormenting and sympathizing with the condition of the dead coolie. As Orwell says” He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. As written by Ashcroft “Ambivalence characterized how colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself nurturing, at the same time.” (Ashcroft 12). At the end, the narrator was happy at the death of the coolie because it gives him the right to show off his superiority and authority over the colonized. As he says “I was very glad that the coolie has been killed.” (p. 2).

The ‘yellow faces’ have won over the narrator. They started casting not only social but psychological pressures too over the narrator to kill the elephant without his intentions. They kept on increasing “Two thousand at the least and growing every minute.” (p. 3). He falls prey to the expectations of the Burmese and his condition is just like a puppet or instrument in the hands of the colonized who has to follow their orders or directions. We could see the anti-imperial feelings of the empire for which he is working. As Patrick Brantlinger says” Anti-imperialist” is as unsatisfactory as condemning it for being a racist.” (Brantlinger 286). The narrator is a white -man who has to endorse his supremacy. He cannot bear or take insult at the hands of the colonized. If he forgoes the plan of shooting the elephant, the conquered would laugh at him. He has to save his face in front of the Burmese to maintain his credibility and had to take the decision that is expected by the Burmese and that is to shoot the elephant. As Orwell says “I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the east (p. 3). The white man holds the power and can decide the fate of the people but in this case, we could see the narrator was under pressure because of the growing crowd every minute. He had to change his mind and kill the elephant just to impress the Burmese. The lives of the colonizers are served by showing power and authority to the colonized. As the postcolonial critics say “Economically powerful nations dominate the weaker and less powerful nations.” (Nagarajan 190).

We could expect that as the white man is the ruling or governing body so power lies within him but the circumstances and situations that he faced time and again determine his weakness. A lot of comparisons

are made to show his weakness. He was labeled as 'hollow', 'absurd puppet pushed to and fro posing dummy'. This indicates that the narrator too is the victim of the colonial empire which also indicates his duplicity. As the narrator says "The British raj as an unbreakable tyranny" and at another point he says: "The greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts." (p. 1). As the postcolonial critics are of the view that "imperial domination shapes the way we think of ourselves." (Nagarajan 190) The narrator had to act like a white man despite being a white character but due to his symbolic position, he had to maintain his hegemony over the colonized. He had to do his face-saving in front of the colonized and to show his 'super-human' or 'heroic' qualities. He had to do what the Burmese expected him to do. As Orwell says "A sahib has got to act like a sahib." (Orwell 3). On one hand, he feels for the Burmese, and the oppression they had to face but at the same time, he hates the colonial work or the dirty work of the empire but ends up maintaining his supremacy and control over the conquered. As Foucault sees it, "power is not a matter of expression, but a constant surveillance of a population." (Macey 134)

As Edward Said (1993) writes, "Orientalism is a western-style for dominating, structuring and having authority over the orient." (p. 3). Thus, Orwell did what he ought to do in that situation. He shot the elephant with his rifle and the poor beast falls on the ground, "powerless to move and yet powerless to die." The condition of the elephant when he was shot is the same as that of the Burmese or the colonized living there "stricken, shrunken and immensely old." This is the condition of the colonized; they had to suffer every time and are the victim of the horrifying imperial rule. They had to tolerate the irrational savagery of colonialism. It is the effects of imperialism that made the narrator shoot the elephant just to avoid mockery at the hands of the colonized and "to avoid looking a fool." As Orwell says "And my whole life, every white man's life in the east, was one long struggle not to be laughed at."

The language used in the story depicts that the narrator does feel for the oppressed but due to his position, he could not help them. Frequently he mentioned, "I had no intention of shooting the elephant", "But I did not want to shoot the elephant.", "Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him". And "But I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to." Reading the story, it is noted that it is about the natives and their sufferings at the hands of the imperial rule. 'The stripped body' indicates the oppression of the Burmese. As the postcolonial critics say "Postcolonial literature may face the danger of being colonized by the imperialism that dominates literary criticism and education the world over." (Nagarajan 190)

Conclusion

It is clear by the thorough study of the text that when the elephant was destroying and demolishing the homes and surroundings, the colonized were not taking any interest which shows that the colonized were not interested in this oppression after getting used to it but when he was going to be shot, they were very glad because it represents that the butcherly British or the colonizers are declining and weakening and soon will be wiped off from Burma. They were fed up with being continuously 'sidelined' or declared as 'othered' by the center or the powerful class and followed Orwell everywhere because now they wanted to get rid of the imperial or colonial empire. The narrator was uncertain at that point when he saw the elephant eating peacefully in the fields that how to tackle the elephant either to shoot the elephant or not to shoot it. It is no more dangerous now. The white man never wants to shoot the colonized because he wants to rule over the conquered and wants to take maximum advantage of them. According to Said (1993) "Orientalism is a western fantasy." (Klages 41). The elephant here is given importance as it is labeled as a working elephant and its destruction is equivalent to the destruction of the costly piece of machinery. The elephant represents the colonized which are important and holds paramount significance in the imperial rule or empire and without them colonial rule is not possible. Thus with the chain of different episodes the thoughts of Orwell remain discursive as he was intended to be the dictatorial figure.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The authors received no funding to conduct this study.

ORCID iDs

Sidra Ahmad ¹  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2325-0574>

Ubaidullah Abid Qazi ²  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9494-2981>

References

- Ashcroft, B. Gareth, G., Helen, T. (2000). Routledge & Taylor and Francis. London. New York.
- Barry, P. (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Can the Subaltern Speak?* N.p.: Routledge, n.d. Print.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Mask*. New York: Grove.
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth*: Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove.
- Farahbakhsh, A., Rezvaneh, R. (2017). Homi K Bhabha's Concept of Ambivalence in J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 26(2).
- Haradhan, M. (2018). Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(2), 20-29.
- Jakaria, SM. (2021). Critiquing Orwell From A Bhabhian Perspective: A Postcolonial Study of Burmese Days and "Shooting an Elephant". *Bauet*. V3.
- Klages, M. (2006). *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum.
- Macey, D. (2001). *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. London: Penguin.
- Mckee, Alan. (2001). *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*. Sage.
- McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester UP.
- Nagarajan, M. S. (2006). *English Literary Criticism and Theory: An Introductory History*. Hyderabad, A.P., India: Orient Longman.
- Orwell, George. *Why I Write*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.
- Quotations by Michael Parenti. (2016)" *Quotes by Michael Parenti*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2016
- Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf.
- Saifullah, A. (2020). The Exploration Of Ambivalence and Hybridity in The Tempest. Associate Institute of English Language and American studies. V-5.

- Sanford, G. (2018). Mixed Race politics and Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory in Charles Chestnutts "The Wives of His Youth" and "The Sheriff's Children". *The Oswald's Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*, 20(3), 16-25.
- Sarwar, Alam. (2006). Orwell's "Shooting An Elephant": Reflections on Imperialism and Neoimperialism. Chittagong. Vol 3.
- Selden, R. (1985). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky.
- Sprinker, M., Edward, S. (1992). *A Critical Reader*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Thuv, T. (2023). *Qualitative Method, Narrative Analysis*. Sage. London.
- Tredell, N., Joseph, C. (1999). *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Columbia.
- Welton, J. (1993). *Impressionism*. London: Dorling Kindersley in Association with the Art Institute of Chicago.