

## The Mask of Civilization and Education: Indians in the Perceptions of the White People

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### ABSTRACT

*Much depends on the 'eyes' of the beholder. This is particularly true when we look at the contradictory and conflicting perceptions of different people about India. India has variously been perceived by the foreigners as the land of mysticism, spiritualism and occult philosophy; the land of wealth and gold; the land of poverty, hunger and disease and so on. What encourages diverse opinions is the lack of total understanding of India and her people. The single most important factor that contributed to the discourse-making of the body politic of India is the phenomenon of 'colonialisation'. The Europeans looked upon the Indians as irrational, laidback, regressed and ignorant and themselves embarked upon the mission of civilizing them. But what lied behind this project is their 'desire' for profiteering and plundering. The natives had, therefore, to be kept in 'deception'.*

Keywords: 'European'; 'deception'; 'colonialisation'; 'desire'.

### (3) Introduction:

In the last two and half centuries of English literature about India one can easily track imperial presence through a wide range of literary and ideological sites. In doing so what crops up is the collusion of empiricism, commerce, casteism and gender division resulting in desire, deception, self-deception within the colonial

framework. Colonial representation presents semiotic meanings in which words, characters, situations, contexts express contradictory impulses and attitudes. That the European colonialists, propelled by their politically subversive power-equations, would look upon the Indians as dark, savage, deprived and illogical, is only true.

Frantz Fanon, in his "Black Skin White Masks", observes how colonial representation legitimizes white supremacy and alienates the native people through a process of discrimination, alienation and inequality. The result is, reification, hybridist, mimicry and self-estrangement.

The French linguist, historian and psychoanalytic theoretician Rene Girard formulated his theory of Aquisitive Mimesis which has a great implication in the present context. Girard is of the opinion that much of the violence and rivalry results from Acusitive Mimesis, an all-encompassing expression of imitation. The violence that results from this surrogates the victim and in the process a ritual originates to heal the brunt of it. According to Girard violence originates when two interested individuals or parties desire the same thing. The conflicting attitude of the colonized and the colonizer is the summative result of wealth, power,

exploitation and the experience of colonialism. To prove his points Girard takes the help of anthropological data and literary texts.

Desire is the fundamental motivation to all human action. While the psychologists are of the opinion that desire arises from bodily needs, the capitalists would argue that desire is stimulated to find more effective ways to induce consumers into buying certain products. In literature desire connotes a wide array of meanings-from aching joy to unstoppable torrent. Such feelings are unmistakably present in oriental, partisan narratives or works that recount the experiences of colonisation. In most of the novels of E.M. Forster there is an homoerotic undercurrent that subverts the original. Deceit or deception, on the other hand, is the act of concealing, distorting or misrepresenting the truth for the purpose of misleading or fraudulence. Such deceptions are found in abundance in colonial, post-colonial or subaltern literature and especially in the works of Robert Southey, Macaulay, Daniel Defoe, Charlotte Bronte, W.B. Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster and many African and Indian writers. These writers show how the European writers stereotypes and vilifies Indians.

English literature about India virtually starts with Dryden's "Aureng-zebe". The European colonial writers used 'the rhetoric of sameness' and 'the rhetoric of otherness' to justify colonial aggression and colonial mismanagement. The English writer, historian and conservative M.P. Edmund Burke did attack ruthlessly the misgovernance of India by Warren Hastings. Burke rued that the oppression of Hastings worked as a catalyst in segregating and compartmentalizing the people of India. Nevertheless, Burke defended

colonialism. According to him, Hastings and his colonial policies regarding India was an aberration. Burke even went on to the extent of saying that subjection of countries like India to the British was a kind of liberation. The nature of Robert Southey's argument regarding political subjugation or colonial control by the British is romantic. His "Madoc" represent colonial encounter. In this work through the relationship between Malinal and Maoc Southey argues in favour of the sameness or hybridity of the colonizer and the colonized. All difference dissipate and cultures are restructured. Southey's notion of imperialism is tempered by the thoughts of Hartley and William Godwin. He envisaged the concept of bicultural merging where violence will yield to love. Southey, however, did not negate violence altogether. Justification of violence was developed in reaction to the dangers which threaten it.

It goes without saying that the colonial experiences of the two different countries like Ireland and India were bitter ones. But one difference is that when the British left India they left her in much less harrowing condition than the Ireland they set free. As because the centre of art and culture was set in London, there was a problem of identity crisis of the Irish that resulted from the colonial experience. The Irish Dramatic Movement was a direct rebellion against the British dramatic tradition. Yeats was also very much against the calm and calculated profiteerism of the British.

Edward Williams' travel journal on India entitled "Sporting Sketches During a Short Stay in Hindustane" not only supplies textual contexts about romanticism but also reveals the relationship between the attitude to travel literature and imperialism and science. William's

narrative is interesting partly because of his associations with Byron and Shelley. Williams' Indian journal is an encyclopaedic attempt at cataloging systematically, with a naturalist's eye, the eastern race, culture and geography. Williams observes that India had always been ruled by cruelty and despotism by different emperors. Comparatively, the British were better in ruling India as they were unfit to rule themselves. Williams incorporates details of the celebrated governor general Lord Wellesley and the ambassador Charles Metcalfe who are shown as preserving Indian Culture.

What related W.B. Yeats more to India is his penchant for occultism, esoteric rituals of Hinduism and subaltern practices at work in Indian societies. The practice of fasting is one of the means through which the suppressed tries to find out the supposed remedy to deceptions and the practice of fasting in the realm of politics was first seen in India and Ireland. In order to carve out his own identity in a literary world W.B. Yeats revolted against the British 'superstructure' and sought identification with the remote and the occult in India that brought in a rich cross-cultural voices. Yeats gleaned many Sanskrit words and phrases to transcend deceptions of the immanent and the colonized experience.

Daniel Defoe finds out how religion, profit, power intervene to represent the politically correct but naturally subverted picture of the 'other' race. Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe"-an adventure story based on a castaway-could be read as an embodiment of Protestant work ethics. It is a propaganda supporting British colonialism and glorifying its creed. James Anthony Froude (1818-1890) justified British colonialism arguing that it is "the only natural law of supremacy for the best" and held that the

British people were superior to rule other nations. But there are many colonialists who believed that the British people utilized the deceptions and camouflage of civilization to hide their desire of profiteering and maintaining hegemony on the colonies of the world.

Rudyard Kipling is one of the few writers who had sufficient knowledge of Indian geography. But that does not make his representation 'realistic'. It is rather the representation of a die-hard imperialist. There are evidences that his "Kim" endorses British imperialism that highlights the superiority of the White and the imbecility and sullenness of the 'other' Indians. Though it cannot altogether be dubbed as pro-imperialistic propaganda, imperial message is very clear in "Kim". Kipling's "Kim" is a project that undertakes to prove the superiority of the westerners over the Indians. In the very beginning of the novel, Kim is seen sitting in defiance of the local law astride the gun zam-zammah-a symbol of British authority. Kim considers himself superior to both Muslim friend Abdullah and Hindu friend Chhota Lal for both Muslims and Hindus fell off zam-zammah long ago. As the narrative develops Kipling seems to emphasize the difference between western civilization that is methodical, scientific and India that is esoteric, extravagant and illogical. Kipling accuses the Indians of being lazy, untidy and ignorant. The Indians may boast of their spiritual knowledge, but Lama's remark on seeing the great railways-"This is the work of devils" reveals how much regressed they are. The Indians have no sense of punctuality and discipline. "All hours of twenty four are alike to them. Indians are also perfectionists in the matter of lying a habit Kim has picked up from them. That the "Keeper of the

Wonder House" is an English man and the English authority in control of the native museum of knowledge is itself a testimony of Kipling's assumed sense of superiority of the British. Kim's training to join the survey as a chairman implicates the empire's aim at charting India that would only help the empire rule it better.

Notwithstanding their quality of tolerance, Indians in "Kim" are represented as stereotyped, Huree Babu is a typical Bengali babu and Meheeb Ali as typical Pathan. Women are marginalized and are considered fit for only child-bearing. Thus we see that Kipling's India raises the problem posed by Edward Said as to how to study the culture of the people from a non-representation, non-manipulative point of view. Kipling's representation of India is bound by the necessities and restrictions of the colonial experience. Said argues that colonialism always tries to fossilize the imperial time and thus makes the writer incapable of controlling his theme.

It is argued that Kipling in "Naboth" favours the hybridity that emerges out of the intermingling of the colonizer and the colonized through the emergence of the interstices that overlap the displacement of differences. But such a conjecture is not supported by any logical argument. Kim's observation of India:

"...the land of holy men stammering gospels in strange tongues, shakes and consumed in the fires of their own zeal, dreamers, babblers and visionaries." (Kipling, 1994)

Shows that though he lived in India he failed to understand her.

E.M. Forster, some people argued, had the humanistic impulse to understand India sympathetically. Despite a gulf of difference in

matters of culture and religion, Forster made an attempt to 'connect' the spiritual and the illogical India with modern Europe. But that is a serious misreading. Forster's description is biased and prejudiced. A healthy relationship requires mutual respect. But Forster finds in Indian atmosphere nothing that can bridge up the gap between the Indians and the British. Instead of praising the picturesque landscape of Chandrapore what attracts the attention of Forster is its 'filth' and monotony. His presentation of 'little oriental' Aziz, Mr. Bhattacharya is rather deceptive and stereotyped. The temples or mosques in India do not harmonize and the religious chantings of Mr. Bhattacharya is rather mocked at. The Indian sun is too hot and trees are shorn of beauty. The country is an eternal jungle infested with rats, bats, wasps and jackals

#### (4) CONCLUSION

Martin Jarret Kerr in his essay "Indian Religion in English Literature 1675-1967" observes that despite the European's fascination for the esoteric India, the picture of the whole India that the Europeans have had was shamefacedly derogatory. Joseph Conrad in his epoch-making novel "Heart of Darkness" deflates the fake civilizing mission of the European white people and depicts the colonialists in Africa as inhuman oppressors. The Europeans had the same objectives with regard to their relation with India. The Europeans who came to India utilized the masks of civilisation and religion to camouflage their 'gaze' and hide their 'desire' for profiteering and exploitation.

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**Bio-note**

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