



COLONIAL HANGOVER IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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ABSTRACT-

Colonization cannot be said to have come to an end with the formal independence since it acts not only at political and geographical level but also at intellectual and psychological level. This makes decolonization a long and gradual process. That is why the independence is to be transferred into the minds of the men since “that which begins in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men” (Young: 3). Due to the long colonial legacy, the minds of the colonized are entrenched with the colonial ideologies and the Eurocentric version and vision of the native. Hence the native tries to identify himself with the colonial master and tries to imitate him and adopt his culture. Thus, despite the political independence he continues to remain in the colonial hangover for quite a long period.

INTRODUCTION-

Though post-colonialism mainly refers to the time after colonialism, for the proper analysis of the people and their life in the post-colonial society we have to take in to consideration the colonial period without which our analysis would be lopsided and garbled. For, many a time the postcolonial conditions are decided and determined by the colonial period. In other words the postcolonial society bears an indelible impact of the colonial regime since the colonialism acts not only at geographical and political level but also at mental and psychological level. For centuries the colonial powers have been forcing their so called civilized values on the natives. That is why when the native societies finally gained independence, the colonial relics were still omnipresent etched out on the psyche of the colonized people substantiating the fact that the process of decolonization does not take place overnight. It is a gradual and continuous process which acts at intellectual and psychological level and which persistently transfers the independence of formal colonial





countries into people's minds. And as long as the people's minds are governed by colonial ideologies, they cannot be said to have ushered into the postcolonial world. This is why Pramod Nayar states, "Colonialism is not merely the political control of regions. It is the context in and through which non-European cultures and knowledge were destroyed, modified, or disciplined by colonial rulers" (Nayar: 2-3). Colonialism does not only involve a political or economic conquest of the native but it also involves the cultural and epistemological conquest of the native by the colonizer. Altering the cultural priorities of the native population by introducing the Western structures like English/European education and European cultural practices is one of the important features of the British colonization. Hence Nandy observes, "The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds" (Nandy: xi). The ideology behind this is to persuade and convince the native that they are subordinate and hence destined to be ruled. These structures therefore ideologically provide a belief system through which the colonizers successfully seek the consent of the native to be ruled, to be subordinated. Taisha Abraham's remark about racial discrimination is highly pertinent here, she observes, "White men consider themselves superior to black men and black men internalize this inferiority and don white masks" (Taisha: 19). When the native internalizes the feeling of their own inferiority and colonizer's superiority, they stop resisting. And when the colonized stop resistance and accept subordination they inevitably become 'colonial' instead of 'postcolonial'.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES-

The present paper attempts to explore the characters and situations in *The God of Small Things* which bespeak this colonization of mind. Through this, the attempt has been made to expose the colonial influence on India even in the post-colonial period.





The God of Small Things abounds in the characters and situations marking the colonial hangover. The twins Rahel and Estha are made to speak English to such an extent that if they are found using any other language they are punished. They read only English books like *Old Dog Tom*, *Janet and John* and *Ronald Ridout*. Rahel expresses her love for Ammu, her mother by quoting Kipling's *Jungle Book*, "We be of one blood, ye and I" (Roy: 329). Estha is seen as an ardent fan of Elvis Presley. Their mother reads them *The Jungle Book* at the bedtime and at the age of seven they have read Shakespeare in the abridged version. The twins have seen the movie *The Sound of Music* three times and know the songs by heart. They frequently refer to the dictionary for new English words. When Estha is molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at the recreation counter in Abhilash talkies, he returns to the theatre and compares himself with the 'clean' Von Trapp children. Estha raises many silent questions and asks, "Oh baron Van Trapp.....could you love the little fellow with the organ in the smelly auditorium ...And his twin sister? (Ibid: 101). He imagines Von Trapp asking, "Are they clean white children?" with Estha answering, "No. (But Sophie Mol is)" (Ibid). They are made to feel inferior to their English cousin Sophie Mol. At the arrival of Sophie Mol, Rahel compares herself and Estha with their English cousin, "Little angels were beach-coloured and wore bell-bottoms. Little demons were mud-brown in Airport-Fairy frocks with forehead bumps that might turn into horns.....And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes" (Ibid: 170). Sophie Mol, their English cousin is presented to them as their ideal. This comparison represents the social belief she has learned from the adults. In this way the twins are made to think and feel that whatever is the white, the English and the European is superior and the best. Ammu and the twins are considered to be out castes as they are considered as the half Hindus where as Margaret and her daughter Sophie Mol are not only accepted but also preferred against





Ammu and her twins. The thoughts of Estha and Rahel and the attitudes and approaches of the adult world around them represent the cultural ideology which according to Michelle Giles, “deems them inferior to English, a consequence of colonialism” which is tantamount to admitting the continuation of colonialism on psychological level (Giles). Roy projects the race discrimination through Margaret and Sophie Mol whom Chacko presents as if they are the Tennis trophies. Sophie Mol is loved and appreciated from the beginning and by all against the twins, Rahel and Estha. This craze for English, the white and the Western reminds us of Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and a major postcolonial author who says in *Black Skin, White Masks*,

Colonialism, with its explicit conceptual under-pinnings of white racial superiority over non-white peoples, has created a sense of division and alienation in the self-identity of the non-white colonized people. The history, culture, language, customs and beliefs of the white colonizers are imposed on the colonized and they are eventually coaxed to consider them as universal, normative and superior to their own local indigenous culture” (Qtd. in Rajeev.G.).

The relationship between India and English has been a complex one in the sense that the colonial experience has made us all foreigners in our own land. We are the Indians by the virtue of our birth in India but the Westerners in our habits, cultural practices and linguistic priorities which have been altered by our encounter with the British and colonization thereafter. All this finds resonance in *The God of Small Things* where we see the Imperial entomologist, the Rhodes Scholar, Elvis records, playing Handel’s water music on the violin and the Plymouth car. That’s why Chacko says in the novel, “Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore” (Roy: 53).





Pappachi, one of the leading characters in the novel is seen imitating the Western ways and culture. He is the senior most member of the Ipe family who appears to be a completely Western man. He is the Imperial British Entomologist who wants to be like and look like a British gentleman. Even after his retirement from the Government job he is always seen in the three piece suit despite the hot Ayemenem weather. He drives an imported sky blue Plymouth car and smokes a cigar. He tries to pose himself as a sophisticated, generous and moral man in the society by donating money to the leprosy clinics and orphanages. Pappachi is an anglophile to such an extent that he is not ready to believe that the English boss of Ammu's husband Mr. Hollick could want Ammu to satisfy his sexual desires against the irregularities of her husband. In fact he would not believe that "an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (Roy: 42).

Chacko the Rhodes Scholar also reflects the English influence on him. He is an ambiguous person and in what is called as his 'Oxford' moods, he quotes long passages from the books of the English writers for no apparent reasons. He is the only person who is aware of their position as the 'Anglophiles'. But like others he also wants to take the advantages by posing to be a Westerner. He is educated in Oxford, poses to believe in Marxism, a Western ideology. He is sensitive enough to realize the position of his family members as "Anglophiles" who "belonged nowhere" (Ibid: 53).

Baby Kochamma is also a character in the same line. She has adopted the Western ways, habits and lifestyle to impress the people in her surroundings. The notion of superiority of the West and the English is deeply entrenched in her consciousness so much so that she frequently denigrates the twins Rahel and Estha against their English cousin Sophie Mol. She belittles Ammu against Chacko's English wife Margaret. Both, Ammu and





Margaret are divorcees. But Baby Kochamma respects Margaret being an English woman while despises Ammu saying,

...a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter, she had no position anywhere at all. As for a *divorced* daughter in a *love* marriage, well words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from an *intercommunity love* marriage — Baby Kochamma would remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (Roy: 45-46)

Through this Roy exposes Baby Kochamma's favouritism to Margaret being an English woman as against Ammu. She loves father Mulligan, an Irish monk. She even adopts the Roman Catholic faith to win his love. Roy presents the satellite television as a powerful medium to disseminate the Western culture and traditions into the non-West. Different channels presenting and introducing the Western culture leave a deep impact on the minds of the people living in the non-West. The impact of satellite television is so magnetic on Baby Kochamma that her interest in gardening is at once substituted by "Blondes, wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d'etat" (Roy: 27). On the weekends she watches *The Bold and The Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*. She is fascinated by their shiny clothes, their smart, bitchy repartee. Even Kochu Maria, the maid does not remain unaffected by the impact of satellite television.

Thus, in the entire novel the characters try to acquire the English language and culture. They send their children to English medium schools, make them speak English language even in day to day life and teach them English manners. The Imperial entomologist, the Rhodes





Scholar, the Plymouth car, Handel's water music on the violin and the mother narrating the bed time stories to the children from the Jungle Book show the continued influence of the West on the Indians even after the formal independence.

CONCLUSION-

Thus, the political independence attained in 1947 cannot be considered as a full stop to the process of decolonization although the British formally withdrew. Even after the formal withdrawal of the British, we still have to come out of the colonial hangover in many respects. The social and cultural structures introduced by them in the colonies are still working in different domains and in different forms. The marked Western and English influence on the different characters and situations in the novel underlines Ashish Nandy's remark, "colonialism never seems to end with the formal political freedom. As a state of mind, colonialism is an indigenous process released by external forces. Its sources lie deep in the minds of the rulers and the ruled. Perhaps that which begins in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men" (3).

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