



A POST COLONIAL EXPLORATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

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Abstract

This concerned paper torches, at large, post-colonial light upon each and every subtle corner of *The Tempest*, one of the most renowned plays by William Shakespeare by virtue of illustrating many a prominent issue in respect of their correspondence with colonialism. It may be conceived as a matter of a splendid quality on the part of the dramatist William Shakespeare to delineate the elementary structure of post colonial theory throughout the countenance of this play *The Tempest*, even at a time, 400 years before the invention of post colonial theory. The play along with its background, characters- major as well as minor, setting, atmosphere, dialogues etc. conforms to the different issues of post colonial theory such as – colonial discourse, binary of us and other, stereotype, hybridity, third space, mimicry, ambivalence, divide and rule, domination of the colonized by the colonisers, supreme control over them by means of not only power of guns but also power of discourse, culture and hegemony. In the post colonial perspective of the play, Prospero becomes the ruthless colonizer, while Ariel, Caliban, Trinculo, Stephano- all are like the innocent colonized people pertaining to the different categories of the colonized, such as civil subjects, masterless people etc. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to focus on the themes of geographical exploitation and settlement, race and ethnicity, quest for identity and resistance.

Keywords: Prospero, Coloniser, Caliban, Colonised, Discourse, Hybridity, Mimicry, Hegemony.

“Post colonialism (covering the terms post colonial studies, post colonial theory and post colonial literature) is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to the study of European colonialism and its impact on the society, culture, history and politics of the formerly colonized regions such as the African continent, the Caribbean, the Middle East, South Asia and the Pacific” (Cuddon,550). The prefix ‘post’, by and large, a temporal marker before the term ‘colonialism’, doesn’t mean ‘after colonialism’ rather, it is used as a continuation of colonialism.

Although the term ‘post- colonialism’ in a general sense suggests ‘after colonialism’, so many critics say that colonialism is not undergone an end but a change of form and colour. Postcolonial criticism is to be traced to Frantz Fanon’s *The wretched of the Earth (1961)*, wherein there exists, according to Peter Barry, “What might be called ‘cultural resistance’ to France’s African empire” (Barry,186). Fanon argued that the first step for colonised people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. The colonisers have still been trying

to devalue the nation's past, they want to see these precolonial eras as historical void. Fanon suggests two steps towards the post colonial perspective—one is to reclaim one's own past, and the other is to erode the colonialist ideology whereby the past had been devalued. In accordance with Peter Barry, "Post colonial criticism draws attention to issues of cultural difference in literary texts and is one of several critical approaches we have considered which focus on specific issues, including issues of gender, class, and of sexual orientation"(Barry,191).

In fact Post-colonialism came to the landmark because of Edward Said's book "Orientalism" (1978) even though so many issues of Said were found earlier. According to Said, the colonisers didn't succeed to rule the colonized only by the power of gun, also by the colonial discourse, their real power was the formation of a successful colonial discourse. The book exposes colonial atrocities, power game not only of gunpowder but also of ideology, the radical intention of the colonisers to dominate, restructure the orient. Said's point 'we were ruled by them as we believe in what they said', binary of 'us' and 'other', which shows the inferiority of other to us, orient was conceived as a strange place where miracle can happen, orient were thought to be degenerating than the occidental. Two types of orientalism were there—

- (i) Latent Orientalism- The fundamental issues of orientalism is not changed. It is static.
- (ii) Manifest Orientalism- The way Orient were represented in classical age, Renaissance age, Modern age is not same, it is dynamic.

Orientalism created political stereotype—one dimensional representation of everything—in order to limit our knowledge. But the point of resistance was out and out ignored by Said, it is not the history of resistance but of exchange, which was ignored by Said.

Contravention of Said's views was done to a certain extent by Homi Bhaba who, in his "The Location of Culture" (1994) shows that the colonial history was not only a history of bloodshed but also

of a hybrid culture. On account of there being an in between space the two parties—the colonizers and the colonized have exchanged so many cultural as well as social values, notwithstanding, it was not an exchange in equal terms forasmuch they could influence us more powerfully than we could influence them. In addition to these there was resistance from within the west, which was not the same as in the works of Said, and Bhaba also tried to diminish the binary between 'us' and 'other' with a view to feel the possibility of a Third Space, which is neither of the entire place of colonisers nor of the colonized, but a space where both can stay together. Moreover, in order to call the colonized inferior the colonisers should know them well. But as the colonized are mysterious, unknowable how did they know them? This contradiction was raised by many critics against Bhaba who raises the terms ambivalence, mimicry to fix this knowability and unknowability, fluidity and fixity. Mimicry is always subversive and by mimicry the colonized tried to revolt both practically and theoretically, the mimic men became the torchbearer of Indian Renaissance. Macaulay introduced English language in India to facilitate rule in this country, by means of making mimic men—'white but not white' who challenged the binary, ultimately boomeranged upon them.

In view of all the important issues of post – colonialist thinkers like Said, Bhaba we find many a trace of post-colonialism in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. However in the light of post –colonial perspective all the traditional issues that we find while reading the drama, become invalid. For example, different issues become prominent—a colonized people Caliban lost his island to Prospero, who becomes the ruthless villain, the colonizer, his power of magic reminds us of the power guns of the colonisers, not only of force but also the power of discourse. Two famous essays, somewhat contemporary to each other, particularly analysed the presence of colonial discourse, power game of colonisers in *The Tempest*, one is Paul Brown's "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine: *The Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism", and the other is "Nymphs and Reapers heavily vanished: the discursive cum text of *The Tempest*" by Barker and

Hume. The first point highlighted by Brown, not much unlike Said was that the project of colonialism was to project more and more civil subjects, those who are always ready to agree with anything the rulers impose upon them, commitment to god turns into the commitment to the ruler or divine king, nonetheless there were two challenges faced by this project of the colonisers—challenge of female body and challenge from masterlessness and savages. The project of making civil subjects did not fulfill in that the rulers were attracted by the temptation of native female body. Another threat was from the masterless people over whom the rulers had no control. Some of them became part of the colonisers with whom they were unhappy so, when they reached here they had found the same condition of the savages and joined with them. Quite similarly Prospero, the colonial master wants to make civil subjects; he faced two challenges—

- (i) Female body of Miranda
- (ii) Masterless people—Trinculo, Stephano; savage like Caliban.

In addition to this the history of the play is similar to the history of colonial expansion. Caliban, a permanent representative of the colonized, is also represented as a stereotype of lust. Like a mimic man who using the language of the colonizer revolted against them, Caliban is discursive, a product of the colonialism. The colonisers wanted to write our history, rather to distort our history, the history of the colonized. The Act I, Scene ii [L:-177-180] delineates how Prospero creates the history and it was the preface attempt on the part of Prospero:

“Know thus far forth,
By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
(Now my dear lady) hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore;” (Shakespeare, 21).

As a Post colonial play, *The Tempest* reflects the binary relationship between Prospero and Caliban, the Occident and the Orient. None but Caliban revolted against Prospero regarding the authority of the island [act-(I), scene-(ii), L:-332-346]:

“This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother,

Which thou tak’st from me.....

For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king: and here you
sty me

In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o’ th’ island” (Shakespeare, 31).

Sooth to say, Colonialism may be defined as an alleged policy of exploitation of backward class by a large power. While Prospero emerges as a European imperialist, Caliban represents the native American. Caliban is performing not only the role of noble savage but also challenging the plan of Prospero [act-(I), scene-(ii), L:-365-366]:

“You taught me language; and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid
you
For learning me your language!”
(Shakespeare, 33).

Insignia of another post-colonial perspective is prominent by means of applying the theory of Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony, which connotes supreme control, authority of the ruler over the ruled by formation of consent of the ruled who are so much brainwashed that they begin to believe that the ideas they are forced to believe are not the ideas of the rulers but those of the ruled. Colonialist discourse was created to make hegemony over the colonized who were being time and again reminded that they are in better regime than the old regime, thereby to creat civil subject. The same case is of Ariel who is being over and again reminded by Prospero the difference between the rule of Sycorax and that of Prospero. Sooth to say, Prospero captivates Ariel’s mind to make him believe prospero superior [act- (I), scene-(ii), L:- 285-293]:

“Thou best know’st
What torment I did find thee in.....
....., it was mine Art,
When I arriv’d and heard thee, that made
gape
The pine, and let thee out.” (Shakespeare,
28).

Another issue regarding the post-colonial perspective of the play is the most famous of the

colonisers—divide and rule; nowhere in the play Ariel and Caliban meet each other and it was a very deliberate act of Prospero to have a permanent hold on the island. Ariel too is colonized not as much as Caliban who was moved by the music of Ariel but did not meet him anywhere in the play [act-(III), scene-(ii), L:-133-138]:

“Be not afeard; the Isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices
That, if I then had wak’d after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again.” (Shakespeare, 84).

In accordance with the theory of powerlessness, in the words of Paul Brown, powerlessness has always the desire for powerlessness; we are accustomed to be into the situation we are put into. Caliban wanted to revolt against Prospero till Stephano and Trinculo arrive. In point of fact Caliban was accustomed to be colonized by Prospero. Paul Brown shows that the dramatic acknowledgement of Caliban by Prospero is something of colonialism. In addition, Bhaba’s opinion regarding this degenerated other is very much the part of the western psyche. Caliban as a mimic man is challenging the colonisers. Moreover the darkness of the colonized is also in the heart of the colonisers, the inseparability of us and other. Prospero might be aware of the inherent darkness of the colonisers, clear manifestations of the darkness within him. “*Post colonial theory is a method of interpreting, reading and critiquing the cultural practices of colonialism, where it proposes that the exercise of colonial power is also the exercise of racially determined powers of representation*” (Nayer 154).

With a view to contradict there are some problems regarding the post colonialist aspect of the play. How to account for the ultimate change of Caliban in act (v) if he is the representative of colonized. Traditional post colonialism cannot answer this. But Neo-colonialism can. Critics have

argued that the post colonialism changes into Neo-colonialism. But the focus of colonialism which is to loot the economy of the colonies, is not changed to a small degree. Even now the focus has not changed, only the strategy has changed. Until the colonisers are forced to occupy a particular land, they don’t occupy it because they have learnt from the history that occupying a country invites headache, hazards, rather they begin to occupy them through culture for the sake of spreading homogenous culture in the entire world. This is what Neo-colonialism has done, they are looting us through culture. In order to do this they need to be benevolent as much as they can. Ultimately we are brainwashed. This happens exactly at the end of the play. To forgive everybody is the strategic change in the part of Prospero in respect that, by capturing the mind of Caliban he has still the authority of the island. Caliban is apparently freed but he is actually mentally enslaved. Sooth to say, people like us are thus mentally enslaved like Caliban—we are the Calibans of the modern society called *The Tempest*.

Much like the colonisers, Prospero leaves the island after being totally sure of his hold on the island. Although whatever we have read can be questioned. Caliban challenges a kind of counter discourse to Prospero’s colonialist discourse. But is the island really of Caliban? Nothing is clearly stated, the ownership of the island is enigmatic. Caliban can be the descendant of the colonizer Sycorax, there are two levels of colonisers, or is it Ariel who is the real colonized?—this is the inherent problem in this play. In addition to this, colonialism is not an accident in the history, it was a strategic move, deliberate move. Was it an intention of Prospero to colonise this? There is no proof in the play that Prospero intentionally came in the island, it was a co-incident. This not only shows the antagonism of Caliban but the marriage of Claribel, the identity of whose husband is mysterious. The origin of the island is a big question. So far how is it just to say Prospero a colonizer and Caliban a colonized? It may be better to say that whatever happens throughout the play is like a coloniser’s act through Prospero. To a large extent, the presence of Post-colonialism in the play is beyond out and out doubt. Therefore, one can easily conclude by saying that Shakespeare’s *The*

Tempest is a comprehensive parable of post colonial theory.

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