

Paranoia of Colonization: An Existential Choice, “Shooting an Elephant”

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Abstract: Colonialism is a state of mind fuelled by the superciliousness of superiority originated from supremacy in complexions, economic solvency and crude political ideology. It imperialistically creates existential crisis by absorbing inner spirits of any free man. This tyrannical philosophy endows the colonizers with immense despotic empowerment to rule people who are considered as unruly blended with animalistic attitude. Existentialism is the perspective of philosophizing the state of mind of an individual in his self-contradictory situation when he is confused by both pessimism and optimism. It is an intellectual and passionate response to doubts concerning the meaning and direction of life. In *Shooting an Elephant*, Orwell lost his power of self will. His job imposed him with immoral responsibilities and made him feel lose self-respect and increase communal (for the British) angst. He has been made de-existentialized by the angry mob under a triumphant feeling of having control the wish of a strong and anarchic colonizer. In this manuscript, we attempted even though Orwell was forced to suppress his conscience towards killing the elephant, the colonized society could not diminish his moral impulses and thus he became the master of his own choice through his writing “Shooting an Elephant.”

Keywords: Existentialism, Colonialism, De-humanization, Anguish.

In the history of colonial world the colonizers are replete with abandoned power and Godly prerogatives. They are like the preachers of 'humanity' for the so called “savage colonized” people who they thought had no moral right to justify their own good for existence. It is universally conceptualized that the colonizers are both ethically and subjectively civilized and uphold the truth of royalty and dignity to create a balanced existential panorama in the world. So the untaught part of the world deserves to be educated, moralized and cherished with colonial bliss that ultimately aims at brutal dehumanizing of human existence. Colonization of the geographical acquaintance eventually results in bringing up an insurmountable psycho conflict in the mind of subdued people who are overwhelmed by torture and angst. This morbid existential condition germinates the seeds of existential crisis both for the colonizers and the colonized ones.

According to Sartre (1945), "Existentialism is a feeling of being within one self with every human feeling that has to be realized only through social surroundings and responsibilities".

Colonialism -the term for the sub continental people is a saga of pain, tears and tremendous loss of self- respect and repentance of religious conflict led by blistering disillusion of human thoughts. It gave nothing to the people of the subcontinent rather than the practice of slavery, learning hypocrisy and a burnish to the innate laziness that was only intermingled with the archaeological upbringing of the Indian people. The anti-imperialist writer George Orwell in his political writings (*Burmese Days*, *Shooting an Elephant*, *A Hanging*, *Animal Farm*, 1984 etc.) figured him out from scared political officers in to a famous opponent to imperialism. Orwell (1934) himself admits that, "were it not for his strong political views, he might never have fulfilled himself as a writer". What was important about Orwell was that he served Indian imperial police in Burma for about five years (1922-1927), an experience that inspired him for anti-colonial writing. Therefore, very naturally his colonial writing must have been pregnant with intensive and insightful implications on colony, and distaste towards colonizers and confused sympathy intermingled with the fusion of antipathy.

Shooting an Elephant is aimed at focusing on two selves of one human being. It seems that the shooter is being mingled into thousands of scary desires. He lost his own colonial dignity better to say his self-respect and entered into the world of huge existential crisis. George Orwell subdued his own human judgment to the demand of the crazy mob that ultimately allegorized the despair, agony and tortured soul. Orwell is the boastful and powerful ruler who has been given the prerogative to "do whatever he likes" in his paradigm of reign the people. He is supposed to uphold the civilized spirit of British Raj to illuminate light in the heart of darkness that represents the ignorant Burmese soul. He is a big man who is the epitome of immense empowerment of the British Kingdom. But Orwell being a moral man could not support his countrymen from his within. So, colonial (though powerful) job created existential crisis in his life. His decision to join Indian imperial police in Burma was of course an existential choice but the brutal terms and conditions of the job de-existentialized him. He lost his power of choice in making desire and ability to listen to his conscience. By losing desire not to kill the elephant, the colonizer became totally the wish puppet of the Burmese. A giant colonizer would kill a giant mammoth that was very natural but the irony of fate gave the brutal Burmese the immense empowerment of ordering their God ruler to kill the mass creature to satisfy their lust of physical hunger.

The colonizer Orwell and the writer Orwell are two different identities.

Rather, it can be perceived in this way that every ferocious tyrant is a timid soul internally. The scary soul is empowered by despotism and more wrongly self-justified by creating a labyrinth of sin and repentance. The celestial power of free will fails to cast a moral shadow on the mind of the colonizers. Orwell lost his free will. The humane Orwell is confronted with the responsibilities of the colonized authority. The master is turned out to be a puppet and the skinny, winter wrinkled hungry ignorant mob became the decisive force. Orwell buried down his tyranny and started feeling for the elephant. However, the mob wanted him to carry out their desire to get the animal killed. The elephant is terrified, as well is, Orwell is fearful. The victimizer and the victim are merged into the parallel boundary of pain and helplessness. The charisma of British Imperialism is being diminished through the trembling fingers of the shooter who mentally cracks down many times before shooting an elephant. Here, the colonial forces psychologically undergo a moral crisis that is wrapped with supercilious boast and shaky perspectives mingled with apartheid dogma. In *Shooting an Elephant*, the fundamentalism of human belief in self-judgment is trodden down by the greed and violence of rulers. Imperialism forced a ruler to act against his moral justification and turned him to be a puppet. The responsibility that Orwell is imposed with, made him feel bitterest about colonialism. His true inner spirit was shattered down when a British woman was humiliated alone in a lone street and the Buddhist priest had no other job rather than throwing dirty and abusive words towards the British Raj. Orwell is tormented, angst-ridden and of course dehumanized by his cleavage self that is confronted with hatred for colonialism and empathy for the Burmese.

Unfortunately, the shooting could not be avoided. The epitomic killing of the British raj through the embodiment of the giant elephant is a bloody mock to colonialism. Here, his passion is subdued by the mob. Fear had totally gripped the soul of Orwell. It is a Fear for losing the uninteresting job and fear from the crazy mob who simply wanted their master to be listened to them. Consequently, his unwished but contemporary colonial attitude dragged the life out of the helpless Burmese in to a state of being lost. So, both are undergoing existential crisis. Either the ruler or the Burmese are subject to anguish, fear, tension, confusion and mocking. The poor uncivilized Burmese being "flogged by Bamboos" are not considered as human. Simultaneously, Burmese Buddhist monks left no chance unused without swearing at the British rulers when found alone. So, both are being mocked at by each other. This attitude is truly perplexing and upsetting. Orwell, in facing an intricate psychological dilemma, theoretically and secretly goes for the Burmese and all against his countrymen whom he termed as oppressors. The job that he chose for serving had become his reason of psychological conflict. A man can be led by his free will when his conscience is not stricken with any kind of

grief or unnatural activities. The ultimate truth of living as a human being is to have the control of the own self and desire. Colonialism actually does not make people civilized but absorb all the inner spirits that any free man bears in his self. The basis of imperialism is fear and blood. So a human being with flesh and blood must be psychologically made etherized and then morally paralyzed in order to furnish him as a proper slave because the colonial powers consider the colonized as brutal creatures. Free will leads a person to show his own existence, to implement his own moral judgment, to override others wrong or any kind of decision that is not supported by his conscience. "Human life is based on making choices" (Sartre, 2004, p.369-409).

In the postmodern world the idea of free will has become wrapped with despotism and capitalism. Meanwhile this kind of pervading thought has swallowed the intellect of the earth. We want to highlight the moral crisis of an individual man to examine a generalized idea of existential crisis through minutely observing some crucial experiences of Orwell. The giant animal is supposed to be trodden down by the crazy mob who are at the edge of tolerance to see the elephant dying slowly because this big murder must bring a feeling of victorious joy in their life. The Burmese, through their crazy presence forced, Orwell to fulfill their wish and for few moments they became the wishful master and thus made their existence known to their ruler, whereas internally, he is absolutely demotivated to accept this unkind and unauthenticated murder. But the "fears of losing dignity" made a barrier between him and his choice of what to do and not to do. Orwell (1936) says:

"At that age I was squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to (Somehow it always seems worsens to kill a larger animal)."

Being a representative of apartheid, the superior white ruler, he must not be frightened before the natives. Unfortunately, Orwell could not stop knocking at his subdued conscience. He is frightened of making an evaluative study between his bound situation to kill the elephant and ethical judgment to opt for not shooting. "Human beings are considered as subjective creation according to the existentialists" (Sartre, 1945, p.626, 627). But his freedom and power to decide endowed him with objective being. So there is an existential crisis. Orwell is detached from his essence (subject) and endeavors to behave with an objective attitude that is compromising his truth that makes him ironically dignified by keeping alignment with mob's desire. He was left with no choice. He could not make any decision for his own. He had to think of the ruling position that must be kept upright and being on the peak of power and gravity he was royally committed to do anything that went for the British favor. It was an unpardonable fault for the British Raj's representative to

show “weakness and fear” before the natives. So it was more of a despotic commitment rather than fulfilling the desire of the mind. The colonizer Orwell and the human Orwell are the two identities in one “George Orwell” who in every moment supports the neglected Burmese. But simultaneously the sneering and jeering of the “yellow faces” haunted him perpetually where as he was tormented by his job which got no support from his inner soul. What he was doing or supposed to do, he did not agree with. It could be perceived in this way that apparently ferocious tyrant Orwell was internally a timid soul.

Actually the elephant is symbolized picturesque of the power that the strong imposes on the weak. One giant animal is being killed by another giant power basically epitomizes the strength begotten by fear, torture, tyranny and blood. The Burmese are now leading Orwell and not ready to listen to his appeal to humanism for not killing the innocent elephant. Imperialism forced the ruler to act against his moral justification and turned him to be a puppet. The mental anguish that Orwell is undergoing is pity arousing indeed. According to Sartre and Camus (1945) “existentialist thought seeks to define the individual and to find his independent existence”. Existentialism is concerned with “being” rather than existing. So Orwell has full responsibility for creating the meaning of his life. Orwell dictates his existence and so he has to take responsibility for his act. This then can cause suffering and angst, which eventually leads a human to discover the true nature of his essence (Sartre, 1945, p. 615). Orwell is struggling to understand, to make sense of his existence and to comprehend the true nature of his being. The job that he is doing is against his conscience. The imperialistic activities carried out are unsupported by his morale. Jean Paul Sartre wrote in his work “Existentialism and Human Emotions”, “that a man first if all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards” (p-345). Orwell was all alone and his only hope was to truly understand his own presence in the universe through intense process of introspection. So the stout police officer, inside a sophisticated soft hearted man, George Orwell was trying to develop an understanding of the nature of the surroundings around him. He became the cardinal symbol of existential philosophy. He insisted him on behaving as a tyrant officer not to scandalize royal dignity and not to be mocked at by the “yellow faced Burmese”.

In an excerpt from “Being and Nothingness” Sartre writes that, “human being is not only the human being whom negations are disclosed in the world; he is also the being who can take negative attitudes toward himself” (p-346). Sartre theorizes that some men in order to make the negative a part of their subjectivity establish their human personality as a perpetual negation. Orwell exists in a state of perpetual state of self-negation. He holds on only one positive characteristic, his intelligence

because without it he is lost. He is able to make the difference between his false dignity and suppressed empathy for the Burmese. His squeamish feeling and introspection allow him the possibility of existential evolution. In a state of confusion Orwell is engulfed with notions of suffering. In "Existentialism and Human Suffering" Sartre states that, "there is no escape from anguish. It illustrates the idea that the suffering penetrates is the inherent torment of existence".

Dostoevsky (1821-1881), said in despair that there are the most intense enjoyments especially when one is very acutely conscious of the hopelessness of one's position. Orwell feels a sense of belonging and in his internal hopeless state of mind he ultimately surrenders to a state of withdrawal and keeps alignment with the desire of the Burmese. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote in "The sickness unto Death" ---"the kind of despair is over one's weakness, the despairing individual does not will to be himself. But if the person in despair goes one single dialectical step further; if he realizes why he does not will to be himself, then this is a shift, then there is defiance, and this is done precisely because in despair he will to be himself" (p-98). In "*Shooting an Elephant*", Orwell reaches this dialectical step. In that moment of despair, shame and hopelessness he felt relief and pacified himself. He was justifying his despair that "legally I had done the right thing; some mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it" (Orwell, 1935). He consoled himself at the end that "I killed the elephant because it was responsible for the coolie's death. It has committed a loathsome action and what was done could never be undone and so the elephant deserved to be killed." At last the bitterness turned into a sort of shameful mixed sweetness and at last in positive and real enjoyment for the shooter.

People act in accordance to nature and define themselves through their action. Orwell claimed that it was limited and stupid. He writes that nature controls the being and the being has no true individuality on freedom. He is only solving the word in which he resides. Orwell's succumbing to desire of the world is fundamentally anti existentialist. The author is torn between his desire to belong to the world and to define himself and his desire to be free and independent. At his core, he wanted simply to act in a way which was not questioned by morality. Orwell endeavored his level best to define himself, to place himself in to the world in to a stark dark jaundiced reality in which he felt he did not belong any more. What endows the existentialist short story "*Shooting an Elephant*" is the infinite ability to define the process to indulge in self-introspection. He fights with his conscious self to attain a spirit of connection with the outside world, while simultaneously he shows strong zeal for his will and independence. So the major affix "ism" in colonialism and existentialism are intermingled concepts. The first one pervades the later one. So it's a kind of superiority over superiority.

Colonialism is the symbolic abstract that emblems blood, invasion, loss, torment, anguish and fear generating absurdity for human life which only makes suitable ground for existential crisis. It is the way of becoming gods for other people who are weak, disintegrated and timid. If civilization means making a wild creature more human than the concept of colonialism successfully aims at de existentialization of humanity. It is boldly dogmatized by the great colonials that humanity is intertwined in the process of converting the savage ones into a cultured well behaved nation. So invasion has been given moral right that it is the responsibility of the people of wisdom to teach and humanize those who remain in the heart of darkness. It actually makes them alienated. This alienation is from the social system, and they do not identify themselves with the organizations of the society (Heidder, 1889-1976and.Levine, 1980).

Truly speaking ,on the rise of colonization with the existence of imperialism in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia introduced an aura of subjection better to say conjugation .Dates later, British colonization brought a phenomenal change in the overall history of world colonization over the sub-continent. Where in the name of civilizing natives they were made to behave, work and react like wish puppet. The whole scenario got a master-slave background with a farcical attempt to create a foreground image like "Civilizing the Native". The native must not be proactive because there lies the germination of freedom and free will and of course the eventual conclusion in achieving liberty. The severe moral crisis waters the seeds of existential crisis. The power of making choice becomes shrouded with confusion, self-conflict and tension (Sartre, 1945).Sartre analyses human soul and identifies the incoherence laid between choice despair.

The despotic endeavors to upright civilization snatching away liberty from the life of the subordinates violate natural order. This confronted situation architecture the dilemma in perspectives towards life and hopefully becomes successful in assisting the rise of existential crisis. Ideologically human life is ultimately meaningless as it has a permanent end like death. But man is particularly infused with the feeling of forgetfulness of death. Nevertheless, the striving for truth never ends. So where freedom is lost, the right to choose for oneself is forbidden and the way for living better is denied then life, no doubt, is deserted and the innate sprightliness of soul is dehumanized. The life being guided, controlled and dominated by other is panic stricken that gradually de existentializes it from his own human stand and gets detached from his essence. The bourgeois ideology penetrates almost all the remaining ideologies of the world with a purpose to exclude other 'isms' which speak for cosmopolitanism. In the same way Orwell was going through in a severe state of helplessness to become a cosmopolitan. Existentialism is a modern philosophical attempt to define and interpret the nature and

meaning of human existence in psychological crisis. Existential thought is predominantly concerned with life of individual doubts, anxiety, hope and fears (Sartre, 1996). Thus the person who renounces bad faith and who lives in good faith fully recognizes and accepts the truth that man is a “being which is not what it is and is what it is not and which chooses the ideal of being, being what it is not and not being what it is” (Sartre, 1945, p. 627).

According to Sartre, the recognition and acceptance of one's freedom and responsibility and the consequent experience of anguish, forlornness and despair is good faith. Orwell throughout his service to the British worked as a mechanical ruler avoiding his own freedom. What he was basically he was not that. He was in a disguise of a ruling officer. But when he became the writer Orwell he started to be introduced to his own self where freedom, desire and morality existed altogether. In his writings, Orwell tried to portray him as a moral figure free from colonial argumentation and confrontation. He did learn to be a man of his own choice. To conclude, the anguish which is the total freedom imposes responsibility on an individual to define his situation, to choose the meaning of his world. The police officer Orwell accepted his fate and carried out the cruel responsibility from his anguish which ultimately led him to self-confess through his anti-colonial writing “*Shooting an Elephant*.”

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