



## COLONIAL POLITICS AND DISSONANCE IN SELF: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE SELECT POEMS OF W.H. AUDEN, ANDRIENNE RICH AND TED HUGHES

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### ABSTRACT

In the postmodern world, though all the countries are enjoying political independence they fail to wield the absolute freedom as neocolonial ideologies stemming from the internal culture suppress the individual, and shatter the self and identity. The colonial regime of the occidental people ends in the mid of twentieth century, yet they colonize the whole world psychologically, economically and in terms of gender in which the power does not come from the outside, but from the inside of the state. The colonial temperament of the occidental people continues to flow in their veins though they fail to detain the colonies under their imperial power. Being colonized by the occidental people, the oriental people fail to obliterate the colonial experience from their minds as it now takes the form of colonial hegemony in which people voluntarily accept the colonial ideologies, and neocolonialism in which the people are colonized by the internal structure of the society bestowing with value loaded ideologies. The main focus of this paper is to show the implied colonial politics embedded in the postcolonial writings and how the neocolonial ideologies break the self into two contrary being that shatters the resonance in the individual.

**Key Words:** Neocolonialism, dissonance, feminism, colonial hegemony, ideology, domination, detainment, power.

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In the postmodern world, people are suffering from the internal colonial politics stemming from the new colonial ideologies such as economy, gender, psychology etc. that divide the character into two contrary self. After getting the political freedom from the British Empire, the Eastern countries fail to wield the absolute freedom. These countries achieved the freedom by name, not able to root out the colonial mentality from their self. At the time of British Empire, they were under the colonial regime in terms of politics, but now they are under the colonial authority in terms of psychology, economy, social status and gender. In both cases, people fail to hold their heads high as an independent being

having their self and identity. This new colonial politics divide the self of people into two beings, one is true to their self, and another is to the people characterized by the false exhibition of the self. In the public place, they seize to be successful to show their true self as the societal norms and rules are against their latent will.

This kind of western colonial politics is not new in the realm of literature, but comes from the discovery of America by the white people in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in which the aboriginal people of the native America are considered to be uncivilized, barbaric and uncultured. The colonial regime of the occidental people gets impetus from this place and

from that time. From this time to the middle half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the occidental people colonized the oriental people politically, that means they directly controlled and manipulated their fate and identity, and instilled their terrorized political power in the mind of these people. But after the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though these people get freedom from the political regime, are being colonized psychologically, economically and in terms of gender in which the power does not come from the outside, but from the inside of the state. In the twentieth century, Vladimir Lenin gave a new meaning to the colonialism by linking it to the capitalism and viewed that "Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of "advanced" countries" (Lenin, 2). There also exists the gender colonial politics in which men are equalized with 'Europeans' as they wield the position of power centre and Women with 'non-Europeans'. "Patriarchal ideology does not allow a woman to think of herself or pay attention to her own demands and desires; therefore, she does not become aware of her oppression in a male-dominated society" (Shymchyshyn, 174).

In "Miss Gee", W. H. Auden very explicitly exhibits the embedded colonial hegemony and new colonial politics that prevail in the society, and points out how Miss Gee is oppressed in the patriarchal and bourgeois society in which proletariat and poor people are colonized economically by the hands of bourgeoisie, and women are colonized by means of patriarchal norms. In both cases, people lose their identity as a human being and are considered as mere objects. Miss Gee being victimized by the patriarchal and bourgeois hegemony is out-casted from the society, and is forced to find her roof in a small hut. Miss Gee is out-casted from the society, not on account of any defect having in her character, but having come in this world as a poor and as a woman. The living condition and dressing code of Miss Gee are not like the ordinary people. She lives in a small hut and wears the queer dress represents her poor and isolated being.

She'd a velvet hat with trimmings,

And a dark grey serge costume;  
She lived in Clevedon Terrace  
In a small bed-sitting room. (Auden, 56)

People start to play with her emotions and all her wishes are disregarded. This kind of indifference attitude of the people leads to the trajectory of self and the breaking of self into two beings. Being out-casted from the society, she is only known to Saint Aloysius, the vicar of the church.

In the patriarchal society in which Miss Gee is living, women are considered as mere object getting no value and attention from the men. In this society, their wishes are not considered with proper regards and their emotions, feelings and desires are underpaid. In every place she is undermined; in church she takes seat 'in the side-aisle', not amidst the other ordinary people and to have wish nothing but be a good girl.

Miss Gee knelt down in the side-aisle,  
She knelt down on her knees;  
Lead me not into temptation  
But make me a good girl, please.  
(Auden, 57)

When she goes to the clinic for diagnosis, her disease is not properly diagnosed. At the end, she stops taking breath for poor diagnosis, and her body is cut into two and then wheeled away another department to study Anatomy. 'A couple of Oxford Groupers' hangs her body from the ceiling and dissects her body into pieces in order to study her body parts.

They hung her from the ceiling  
Yes, they hung up Miss Gee;  
And a couple of Oxford Groupers  
Carefully dissected her knee. (Auden, 58)

This kind of inhuman attitude was only discernable in the colonial regime when the oriental people were tortured and oppressed like the animals. But in the present situation, this new colonial politics is continuation of the imperial regime in which people were colonized politically losing their identity and freedom.

In this patriarchal society in which man plays with the body of woman, Miss Gee is not in a position to fulfill her latent desires, so in dream she succeeds to fulfill her hidden desires. Her fantasy comes in reality into her dreams when one evening she has a

dream of becoming a queen of France and the Vicar of Saint Aloysius would be the king. As the Vicar of Saint Aloysius is the only person known to her, she has a dream only on him. The dream acts as a wishfulfillment to her as her wish gets a fulfillment in her dream. Here her character is divided into two self – one is poor Miss Gee whose low-birth identity is true to the society, and another is high rank queen of France which is true to her dream world of fantasy. According to Sigmund Freud, it is impossible to hold on our latent wishes in our unconscious, someday it must come out from the dark place as a form of patent desire in our dream that acts as a wishfulfillment. The same thing happens with Miss Gee in her dreams. The shadow or her latent desire of becoming a queen comes in reality into her dreams, not in real society because the persona or the societal norms are against her desires. In society, the rich people have the only chance to wield this high social status of becoming a king or a queen.

So it is observed that like colonized people, here Miss Gee is suppressed and oppressed in terms of economy and gender in which the rich men take the position of colonizers. Though the imperial attitude of the occidental people comes to an end in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in present scenario their colonial hegemony and ideologies are in flux in every society. In society, men take the position of colonizers and wield the top position. In their eyes, women are merely objects whom they used to fulfill their meager needs. For the prevailing of colonial politics in the society, women are incapable to show their true faces as the societal norms stand as huddle in their way. So their self is divided into two different identities - one is meek, mild, poor and downtrodden and another is brave and rich regime of king and queen.

In "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", Andrienne Rich presents the two images of life – one is brave, proud and carefree world of tiger that are the inner traits of Aunt Jennifer and another is the submissive and caretaker woman in the traditional marriage life. The poem opens with the description of tiger that holds the firm steps on the screen, and is the king of the green world. The tigers are bold, proud and fearless in their world. They do not fear the men

behind the tree. Their all steps are chivalric and consistent. They are not meek and mild, and are not wavering, but have a swaggering walk. This is the image of tigers created by Aunt Jennifer on her needlework.

They do not fear the men beneath the tree;  
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.  
(Rich, 19)

The image of the second stanza is totally antithetical to the first image of tigers that have freedom and dignity. The marriage life of Aunt Jennifer is characterized by shyness, nervousness, timidity and submissive nature. She is so nervous and timid that she finds her finger 'fluttering through her wool'. She also finds that it is very difficult for her to pull the ivory needle. Aunt Jennifer finds to pull the needle as her freedom and dignity is curtailed the restrictions of marriage, symbolized by the wedding band that weighs down Aunt Jennifer's fingers as she sews.

They massive weight of Uncle's wedding  
band  
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.  
(Rich, 19)

In the final stanza, it is discernible that even after the death, the patriarchal hegemony brews in Aunt Jennifer's marriage life that fails to make her free from 'ordeals,' but her bold, proud and fearless creation of tigers transcends her to the wishful world of definite will, power and pride from the claustrophobic caretaker world of female.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will  
lie Still ringed with ordeals she was astered  
by. The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.  
(Rich, 19)

The poem depicts certain ideological concern in which woman is suppressed and colonized impliedly in the patriarchal society. It is explicitly a feminist poem which is critical of the male world for terrifying and oppressing Aunt Jennifer causing her to create an alternate world of freedom, one which she could not inhabit other than imaginatively or aesthetically. Aunt Jennifer is suppressed by the conventional marriage in which she is pinned down by the 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'. Just as the tigers are a projection of Aunt Jennifer, it

seems that the men beneath the tree are a projection of Uncle. In the society, as power is envisioned only in terms of patriarchal chauvinism, the revolutionary vision of Aunt Jennifer gets a fulfillment in the imaginative world or in the world of art.

Andrienne Rich argues that "Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men-by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male" (Of Woman Born, 57). In this poem, Aunt Jennifer is also not colonized directly by the political ideologies, but by being the victim of cultural and economic exploitation in the patriarchal society in which power comes from the internal power centre, not from the outside. Man used to exploit the woman by structuring the society according to their vested interests and by installing certain patriarchal ideologies in that structure. In this patriarchal chauvinistic world, man used to wield the rudder of the society and woman comes under the exploitation and control of them. In this society, colonial politics continuously exerts its imperial power over minority people taking the varied face, form and shape.

The poem presents the two contrary states of self – one is brave, proud, vigorous and carefree self represented by the world of tiger that are the inner traits of Aunt Jennifer and another is the meek, mild, dejected, dispirited, submissive and caretaker self represented by the traditional marriage life of Aunt Jennifer. Here Tigers are the physical incarnation of inner desires that Aunt Jennifer wishes to have in her actual self.

Aunt Jennifer's needle work acts as a wishfulfillment to her as her wish gets a fulfillment in her needle work portraying the picture of tigers beneath the tress. Here her character is divided into two self – one is meek and submissive self which is true to the society, and another is proud and carefree self which is true to her dream world of fantasy. The shadow or her latent desire of leading a carefree life comes in reality into her needle work, not in real society because the persona or the societal norms

are against her desires. In society, men have the only chance to wield this freedom of leading a carefree life.

Ted Hughes, a postmodern animal and nature writer, exhibits the colonial mentality of hawk in his famous poem "Hawk Roosting". In apparent sense, the poem harbours the dominant temperament of hawk especially Nature. Contrary to the modern man's inconsistency of mind, hawk manifests its firm determination and dominion over all the creation. At first, the hawk expresses its privileges of being at the top of the wood that enables it to have inspection easily over all the creation. The superior and dominant mentality of hawk is visible in the next lines, when the hawk echoes:

It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold Creation in my foot (Hughes, 68-69)

The hawk is so fierce that it displays no mercy to any of its prey and its 'manners are tearing off heads'. Its fierce and dominant temperament is never distracted by any false argument or any desiccated reasoning. The only purpose of his life is to direct its ways 'through the bones of the living'. At the end, the hawk has a consent that 'nothing has changed since I began' that delineates its protracted colonial mentality that it wants to detain forever.

The sun is behind me.  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My eye has permitted no change.  
I am going to keep things like this. (Hughes, 69)

The violent and dominant temperament of hawk explicitly expresses the colonial mentality of White people who at one time ruled all the countries. Like the hawk that holds all creation in its foot, the occidental people once used to keep all the countries under their control. The manners of hawk are tearing of heads, and at the time of its hunting it shows no mercy to any of its prey. Similar to it, the sole motive of occidental life is to spread the imperial regime and to keep control over all the countries. In the present age, the occidental people yet believe that they are superior, civilized and cultured and they want to detain this kind of

colonial temperament all the time like hawk that never wants a change.

Violation and domination of the hawk can be equated with the Freudian concept of Id lying at the unconscious having dominant power over the superego that lies at the conscious level of our mind. Id resides at the place of our psyche and is guided by the pleasure principle. Its main principle is to get pleasure bothering nothing else. Similarly the hawk kills its prey to feed itself and to get pleasure out of it. The logical argument or any reasoning that is the instrument of superego is unable to divert its mind. In real world, man also longs to be like the hawk – carefree, determined and vigorous, but for the societal norms he suppressed his wishes and desires.

In 'Hawk in the Rain', Ted Hughes presents the two contrary states of self – one is consistent, determined, violent and vigorous self represented by the hawk and another is swaying, dejected, dispirited and downhearted self represented by the man. Hawk is the physical incarnation of inner desires that man wishes to have or should have in their self. But in the postmodern world, people are so obsession with the material world characterized by moral and spiritual degradation that they forget to enjoy the beauty of nature as they become the slave of machine. In this world, steadiness, vigour and strong will are absent from the life of people. The man only "envies the hawk its apparent centrality and poise. The hawk exhibits a mastery over those forces which threaten its survival and identity that the poet's heart stirs for. The hawk cannot drown or lose its bearings, since its pole star, the stable fulcrum of the universe, is within it. Man, with his burden of consciousness, does not know who he is or what his purpose. But he does know that he will die" (Sagar, 15). In this poem by exhibiting the superiority of hawk over man in terms of will-power and the power of will, Ted Hughes wants to convey the message that man should have possessed these positive values in their life. Like the previous poem 'Hawk Roosting', here the colonial mentality of occidental people is represented by the violent and enduring temperament of the hawk having the enduring, strong and determined mind contrary to the human beings having the swaying,

inconsistent and weak mind. In the heavy rain, the man finds that it is difficult to walk with ease, so drags him through the mud. Contrary to that, the hawk flies effortlessly at a high point, maintaining its pose and equilibrium.

I drown in the drumming ploughland, I drag  
up  
Heel after heel from the swallowing of the  
earth's mouth,  
From clay that clutches my each step to the  
ankle  
With the habit of the dogged grave, but the  
hawk  
Effortlessly at height hangs his still eye.  
(Hughes, 19)

In the last stanza, it is observed that the imperial regime of the occidental people will not be immortal in this world like the hawk that by following the wrong path 'hurled upside down' and 'mix his heart's blood with the mire of the land'. The downfall of the hawk indicates that the hawk is not immortal or invulnerable similar to the colonial regime which is subjected to meet its doom.

Coming from the wrong way, suffers the  
air, hurled upside down, Fall from his eye,  
the ponderous shires crash on him, The  
horizon traps him; the round angelic eye  
Smashed, mix his heart's blood with the  
mire of the land. (Hughes, 19)

In these two poems, Ted Hughes' interest in the primitivism "is not a rejection of culture but a concern for culture. ... He is interested in the sophistication of primitive cultures (and not only primitive cultures) in areas, particularly dealings with the inner life and the natural world, where our own is barbaric" (Gifford, 21).

Thus it is observed that all these poems are scintillating with the hidden colonial politics in which power comes from the internal power centre or the new colonial ideologies. In the poems of W. H. Auden and Andrienne Rich, gender and economy work as colonial instruments by which women are colonized. In the rich patriarchal society, man exerts power over the women by using these two tools. In the patriarchal chauvinistic world, as the

independence and desires of women are suppressed, they try to find another means to outlet their emotions. So here Miss Gee finds the dream world and Aunt Jennifer the needle world as the best instrument to incarnate their inner emotions. On account of that their world is divided into two contrary self that provides their character a dissonant condition. In the poems of Ted Hughes, the hidden colonial ideologies are exposed by the violent temperament of hawk. The hawk always considered himself as superior to the man like the occidental people who always considered themselves as superior to the oriental people and were more civilized and cultured in comparison with them. His poems also depict the two contrary states of self which are totally opposed to each other – one is consistent and determined self represented by the hawk and another is swaying and downhearted self represented by the man. These two contrary traits give birth to the dissonance in their character.

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