

# Shooting an Elephant: A study of Hypocrisy; Not Heroics

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**Abstract**-Hypocrisy is the practice of engaging in the behavior or activity for which one criticizes the other. George Orwell's 'Shooting an Elephant' is an essay where hypocrisy is exposed. Because in one side Orwell claims that imperialism is an evil thing and he hates it more bitterly and at the end of the story he establishes himself as an example of a genuine imperialist by performing his noble duty- that really carries his true identity as a hypocrite. It is an act of hypocrisy not heroics in a sense that he shows no courage to express the truth publicly and likes to impose it on the natives. As an agent of British imperialism Orwell shows the tendency of an act of hypocrite by wearing the mask of imperialism and finally unfolded it through the actions and his attitudes. So this paper is a modest attempt to show how hypocrisy is focused through the actions and the descriptions of the narrator who is bold enough in speaking the truth and exposing the lies. Actually the writer as an agent of the British Raj at first knows what he should do to the natives but he tries to show his innocence which becomes an issue here.

**Keyword**-George Orwell; Imperialism; Symbol; Shooting an Elephant; Colonialism

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

George Orwell's Shooting an Elephant and other essays is perhaps the collection of the most splendid essays in English language. "Shooting an Elephant" deals with a very tiny incident of writer's professional life while he was working as a police officer in Burma. Here Orwell as a narrator has depicted all issues that make him realize what actually he felt. It is a kind of confession for Orwell's so called pride and hypocrisy. As he is bound to keep up the pride of the British Raj in the native area; it is known to him also that the glory of the British raj is declining day by day in the colonized area. So his blind belief and his blind effort makes himself hypocrite to think about the native in an ugly way and so he does it in this essay which is going to discuss.

In that essay orwell is explaining the impact of British imperialism in a colonized area. The British Empire comes into Burma, colonizes them, and destroys the natives' way of life. In this way she makes herself a part of their livelihood and takes away their freedom. Actually the native did not get the opportunity or the right to work for their own wellbeing because of the presence of the British Empire. Their fate is totally dependent on the West, perhaps on their own interest. As an imperial officer in India George Orwell recounts one of his life experience in Burma. The main purpose of the essay on one side is to establish the picture of imperialism how it affects the lives of both the imperialistic officers and the natives in the colonized area and on the other side he wants to represent himself an apple of eye to his readers.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature and it is based on content analysis. The data are taken from both primary and secondary sources. Primary source refers to the author's own writing, whereas the secondary refers to the works done by the others on the author.

## 3. DISCUSSION

If we go back to the past we find that until 1885 the British colonized Burma; they captured the Royal Capital of Mandalay and declared Burma as a whole part of the British Empire. From that day Burma came under the reign of British imperialism. And George Orwell spent five years from 1922-1927 as a police officer in the Indian Imperial Police force in Burma (now Myanmar) while Burma had become part of the British Empire during the nineteenth Century as an adjunct of British India. Burma became worthy to them because of man power. Migrant workers from India and China supplemented the native Burmese population which makes her as a source of cheap labor market (Back cover description, Penguin Books, 1967)[5]. Besides this, the enormous production of the teak from up-country forests and one of the greatest sources of rice of the whole world make it worthy of being colonized. It happens with Marlow, in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Conrad seems to be saying, 'We Westerners will decide who is a good native or a bad, because all natives have sufficient existence by virtue of our recognition. We created them, we taught them to speak and to think, and when they rebel they simply confirm our views of them as silly children, duped by some of their Western masters.' (Said, 1993: XX)[3]. Actually the westerners they have

felt for the colonized people in this way. In Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" it assumes that Kurtz has played an enormous influence on natives and how easily he took the control on collecting the ivory from the colonized South Africa. Like him Orwell also terrified the local people by triggering the gun and by shooting the Elephant. In "Shooting an Elephant" we also find the presence of Orwell alike while working as an agent of British. Imperialism Orwell found that the native mock at the British, they spit out the British even they didn't spare any British woman to make fun with. Besides a large crowd also created pressure on Orwell that is why at the end on the spot he took the decision to make them realize about the value of having white skin. So not only the racism but also the effects of the characters' social interactions act as an important tool for English governing in Burma. When they arrived in the native country they knew it very well about their own purpose, own interest and started to reign over the natives because of the ignorance of the natives. On the other hand it is considered that as they are being insulted by the natives it means that the natives now are aware of their rights. His openness to speak to the Burmese about this further develops his identity in the essay. He does his best to expose himself to the Burmese culture saying, 'There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seem to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans' (Orwell, 2003:31)[6]. According to him like the other English he is always ready to give the service at the native people as a police officer who is not a native further he is a guest who have come from the west only for their service. It is actually the courtesy of the British that they are always helpful, they provide the service for the others. The natives should make them submissive to the British rather in query of what they are doing. They always try to laugh at the British, make him an obvious target as he is a British; even in the football field the crowd yelled with him hideous laughter that made him nervous. Actually when the writer himself works as an agent of the British imperialism during that time the British Raj is about to lose their golden time. It comes to an end. And by this time the natives also acknowledged the British and the real purpose of their staying here. British rule has begun to collapse in Burma; as Westfield in "Burmese Days" states 'to the point where the natives no longer respect their rulers' (Penguin, 2009)[2]. It is the proper time the British should simply leave the native country. The issue of pride and prestige is related with it. This is the reason which turns him nervous and compel him to act as a hypocrite. Thus the existence of British men in Eastern countries wants to make futile while they come to at stake even by taking the life of a living animal which is a clear example of hypocrisy.

This essay "Shooting an Elephant" is a tale from those days when imperialism is becoming weaker day by day. On one side the British are trying to keep their existence and on the other side they consider the natives as worthless, futile, uncultured, manner less which is quite unjustified. Actually by this time they come to know about

their rights. It makes the English panic. So he wears the mask to hide his nervousness. In 'Culture and Imperialism' Edward Said says, 'imperialism means the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory', 'Colonialism' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements of distant territory' (Said, 1993:8)[3]. In a word actually imperialism is a kind of idealism where the West take leading position usually to show the responsibility of making the natives civilized. Said says that Culture means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication and representation that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure.

Culture is a source of identity. Though George Orwell by birth is an Indian and in this story he shows no respect to the native people because of his having white skin. His this white skin represents his identity as a British which comprises to show his attitude and action to reach the final decision. He poses the superiority for his own identical policy. Actually culture helps anyone to keep themselves engage in political and ideological conflict. So most of the professional humanists as a result are unable to maintain a good relationship between the brain and the soul. They have to sacrifice one for the sake of their professionalism. One of the difficult truths is discovered in this essay through the narrator which is the killing of the Elephant by the author while he wears the mask to hide his face but fixes up his finger to the gun to shoot the Elephant; to achieve the success. He wears the mask because he knows that he is going to do wrong which is a matter of shame for himself personally. And at the same time he knows that it should be done by himself because it is his duty. This is an act of hypocrisy. According to the dictionary hypocrisy means a person who contrivances of a false appearance of virtue or goodness while concealing the real character. He began the writing of his essay blaming and accusing the natives as uncultured; because the native who are black, they don't know how to behave gently with their guests who have white skin and on the other side he himself demolishes the code of behavior forgetting that the Elephant which is killed at his hand it is the assets one of the natives who is a poor and powerless. Here he mentions that the white man must sacrifice his individual values to service of the hegemonic discourse. As Orwell, through Westfield confessed that- the British do this through their racist attitudes, actions and beliefs which put the natives lower in the power hierarchy by treating them as lesson who need the English aid (Burmese Days; Penguin, 2009)[2]. It is the cause of pride and belief of the British that it is their aim to serve the native people and to gain the power in return. They also believed that the uncultured norms and behavior of the natives are responsible to turn them into oppressors. Partially Orwell's identity describes here as one who seeks approval from everyone he is associated with. He tries his best to integrate his lifestyle

with the Englishmen as well as he wants to be a part or an example for the Burmese society. "I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home." (Orwell, 2003:35-36)[6]. ".....They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the Elephant after all" (Orwell, 2003:36)[6]. The confusion of identity and the need for approval later leads to his demise. As a true imperialist and a loyal citizen of the mother country England Orwell knows very well that what is his duty and how can he make satisfy to his govt. It can be said that as Burma is their own motherland so the Burmese they should not remain in collapsed in their own country. They should raise their voice for their birth rights. They should not remain submissive to the British who are their oppressor and should turn them as the part of the ruling class also. In spite of knowing that he tries to perform his job as a ruling class by wearing the mask he sacrifices his idealism and re-establishes British pride and glory.

Perhaps the essay "Shooting an Elephant" is a representation of hypocrisy but not the heroics of the author himself because we find the contradiction of his character. Once he said, "I was all for the Burmese" (Shooting an Elephant: 2003)[2] as he took his birth in India; again he expressed his opinion behind the shooting of the Elephant saying that 'Solely to avoid looking a fool' (Orwell, 2003:40)[6]. At the beginning of the essay he said that imperialism is a bad thing but in the long run he shot the Elephant only to brighten the glory of the British Raj. In spite of knowing the fact of what he ought to do with the Elephant he has burdened the natives with the liability of the killing of the Elephant. Again he said, "A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things" (Orwell, 2003:36)[6]. But later he mentioned "I had no intention of shooting the Elephant- I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary- and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you" (Orwell, 2003:35)[6]. It is Orwell's own opinion that human beings are easily convinced by the influence of other human's opinion's and expectations. 'In Moulmein, in lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me" (Orwell, 2003:31)[6]. In this way the act of hypocrisy is clearly focused in the essay until the end while the young man said, 'It was a damn shame to shoot an Elephant for killing a coolie because an Elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie' (Orwell: 2003)[6]. Exactly; the European thought that they are the superiors because they have white skin, because they came from the west part of the world. In his novel Burmese Days he also brought a portrait of the British Raj. In this novel he picturised the natives as 'after all natives were the natives; they are interesting no doubt; but finally an inferior people' (Penguin, 2009)[2]. In this way Orwell shows his hypocrisy throughout the racist attitude which plays an intricate role in what the English view as successful and

proper colonization. They believe that to maintain their power as well as to keep their own best interests at the forefront they need to oppress the natives. So the writing of this essay is one of the writer's effort to manipulate his readers that the native people make him crazy and move him to do it. But actually it is a hypocrisy revealed by the author himself.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The British are born not to be confined anywhere; rather they like to chain others. They believe that they have the power to control the others which is their pride also. And helps to become oppressor of others. Each and every single moment Orwell as an agent of true British imperialism tries to neglect the local people without having any right. Their ill mentality drives them to do ill jobs to re-establish their lost image. By mentioning black skin, brown skin, coolie he at least tries to satisfy himself. Even in the last portion of the essay he insults the natives saying that while he is too upset for the dying Elephant then the local people they make themselves to occupy in collecting the meat of the Elephant. Again at the opening page of the essay he also mentions that it is one of the native police officer who makes a call to him to go to the spot where the Elephant is doing ravages. If he does not get such kind of phone call from a native police officer then a large animal Elephant will not be killed by him. As he goes there he feels the pressure which is a social status and psychological pressure by the natives that compel him to shoot the Elephant for keeping the British pride and their existence also. But he overlooks all the pressures of the native what they feel, what they want to get rid of themselves from the chain of the curse of imperialism. It is really a kind of hypocrisy while the British police shows a lot of sympathy for the native people but not willing to lose his status as an imperialist. Thus through the story the narrator wants to influence both sides which is a trait of hypocrisy. Finally it can be said that George Orwell inspired the passion to dominate the native country in a hidden way.

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