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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Navigating Mixed Identities in Colonized Nations: Exploring Self-Apprehension Through Post-Colonial Lens

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aims to examine the use of self-apprehension processes to study the values and reject conventional colonial rhetoric. Three poets, Langston Hughes from Africa, Oodegeroo Noonuccal from Australia, and Shujta Bhatt from India have their post-colonial perspectives examined in this qualitative study. With an emphasis on nationhood and nationalism, the writers seek to rewrite history for their countries. Hughes' "*The Negro Speaks of Rivers*" describes the rich cultural legacy of the African race, Noonuccal's "*The Dispossessed*" symbolizes the wrongs done to her country by European colonists, and Bhatt's "*A Different History*" examines the effects of colonialism on the Indian people. According to Ashcroft's national and regional models, the distinctive features of the particular national or regional culture are explored. The realities of colonized and colonizers are brought to light in post-colonial literature, emphasizing how colonizers' seeds have weakened the foundations of colonized nations and destroyed their sense of national identity. By highlighting the cultural and moral distinctions between colonized and colonizers, the research opens the ground for further researchers to explore the problem of reputation and dignity through a colonial lens.

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**KEYWORDS** Colonized, Culture, Identity, Nationalism, Self-Apprehension

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**Introduction**

Post-colonial writings cover all cultures affected by the imperial process from the period of colonization to the present day. And it is a continuous process (Ashcroft et al 6). Most post-colonial writings explore the relationship between literature and place. This link or relation makes them effective to feel a difference from colonizers. In this paper, three poems of colonized poets are being analyzed from a past colonial perspective. Poets want to highlight their differences from the so-called center and throw light on their self-importance and self-apprehension. "*A different history*" is a famous poem by Indian poet Shujta Bhatt. She was born in India, immigrated to the United States and now residing in Germany. She describes her childhood as the "Deepest layer of my identity." In her poem, she expresses her love and concern about her culture and land. She called the English language an "oppressor's tongue" and she claims that this language has come here (India) to murder other native languages. She says that we know etiquette and manners before their arrival to our land but now they teach us how to behave with things like books. How to turn their pages manually? Overall, she tries to defend her own culture by protesting the foreign rules and regulations on her land.

The second poem is "*The dispossessed*" written by Oodgerou Noonuccal. She was born on North Stradbroke Island in South East Queensland but now she refers to herself

as aboriginal. She was an active member of the Communist Party of Australia. In her poem, she explores the negative results of colonization and she claims that Australia would be better without colonization. She says that it was a peaceful land before colonization. And make native people realize their self-worth. She says that colonization had brought a disease to them and named it a religion. She wants her people to understand their values and stand up again to look back at their foundations. The third poem is "*The Negro Speaks of Rivers*" written by Langston Hughes when he was only 18. In this poem, he celebrates and reclaims his beautiful and rich culture. He points out different ancient rivers and claims that they (Africans) know the history well and better than the colonizers. Colonizers claim that they are the only sophisticated nation and they are more civilized, which is not true. Hughes pens about this injustice and says that "his soul" which represented the souls of his nation is deeper and more civilized. The basic purpose of analyzing these three poems is to highlight the concept of self-worth, and self-apprehension in the minds of these post-colonial poets. Colonizers are indeed successful in colonizing their bodies but their souls are still unstained and pure.

### Literature Review

Fanon (1986) considers British imperialism, according to Fanon, produced the oppressed world by using the manpower and physical assets of its territories. According to him, blacks are vulnerable, and colonization may cause problems like inaction, lust, a sense of worthlessness, bitterness toward oneself, and anxiety. McLeod (2000), in addition to declaring the possibility of transformation and recognizing significant obstacles and adjustments that currently exist, postcolonialism questions imperial modes of perceiving by emphasizing depiction and tangible reality (34). According to Greenbalt (1991), Indigenous is frequently witnessed as having originated as a result of the Western proximity marked by primitiveness. Bhaba (1994) uses research on the emotional toll endured by settlers to examine contradictions in White's paradigms to critique imperial ideologies. Post-colonial writings are explored since their creation to get the meanings of writers and their purpose in creating such work. "*A Different History*" by Shujta Bhatt is analyzed by different reviewers.

An article on UK essays comments that this poem has a critical tone to her own culture and religion. She wishes not to disturb identities such as "Sarsvati", the Hindu goddess of art and knowledge, due to her extreme importance in Indian culture. She tries to explain the hazards of cross-culture consequences. In another article by weebly.com, her poem is taken as a lament on the loss of culture by the use of repetition of rhetorical questions and symbols. She explains the destruction of language which was replaced by another. The same webpage discussed an Australian poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal "*The Dispossessed*". According to them, its language is quite literal and it shows the impacts of colonization in Australia. Kath Walker has included this poem in his collection "*The People and Steps of parliament house Canberra*". According to her, this poem represents indigenous culture and the title of the poem reflects the behavior of colonizers with native Australians. It also reflects the historical interaction between white Europeans and indigenous. (Prezi.com). The third poem by Langston Hughes "*The Negro speaks of rivers*" is a representation of his rich African traditions and civilized culture. In this review, Kirkas that "*it is considered Hughes's signature song of Harlem Renaissance and poignantly expressed through the artistic trademark watercolors, depicts in successive double-page speaks black children playing by Euphrates*". Patricia Tauzer in her review says, "*Words and water colors sing in a voice as deep as rivers*". Babtex Miller says, "*The double identification with penetrative time and receptive timelessness appears perhaps most notably in The Negro speaks of rivers*" (crisis June 1921).

## Material and Methods

It is a qualitative research based on a post-colonial perspective. Based on special characteristics of these poems, they are analyzed under national and regional models, which emphasize the distinctive features of the particular national or regional culture (Ashcroft et al 14). According to Bill Ashcraft (1979), the most potent area of this model is to express differences from the center. And to claim such kind of difference, these writers need to go back to their past and need to explore their self-importance in the present. The study of national traditions is the first and the most vital stage of the process of rejecting the claims of center to exclusivity. It is the beginning of what Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka has characterized as the process of self-apprehension (Soyinka 1976). Post-colonial writings must have this self-apprehension as an essential component. It is also referred to as a self-constitutive entity. This tradition highlights the importance and worth of their culture. Their views about the nation are expressed in such a way that depicts their national pride. They reject the standard norms and values of the center. The writers are of the view that the West only inculcated seeds of hatred among them, they were living happily and peacefully on their lands. These colonizers compel them to see through their spectacles and lose their self.

Post-colonial writings reflect each country's culture. These writers understand the purpose of colonizers. According to a famous journal, *black and white* (1891-1911), they represent that empire predominantly as a site of exotic, adventure, and exploitative. It had defined it as a contrastive element within the British worldview. As Albert Memé said the colonizers not only destroy the present but also the past and devalue you in your eyes. Hence the purpose of post-colonial writers is to gain that value back from them by exploring their past and bringing positive aspects of their civilization to the face of the world. They try to show the world that their peace and happiness are stolen by the colonizers. And as Frantz Fanon rightly said about African nations these colonizers wanted to put Africans a white mask on black skin. Writers like Langston Hughes try to take out that white mask to show the world that they are happy with their black skin.

## Results and Discussion

Different poets write these three poems but the common element in these poets is their colonized background. These poets belong to those nations that were under colonial influence once and have more or less marks of colonialism still present because according to Bill Ashcraft colonialism is a continuous process. "*A Different History*" is written by Shujta Bhatt, an Indian poet. She writes in particular perspective of British colonialism in India. She misses her childhood here in this land that gives her identity. At the very beginning of the poem when she says "*Great pan is not dead*" (Bhatt, line 1). Here great pan symbolizes colonial powers. She says that their brutality is never dead or it has not ended yet. It continues. They are continuously trying to control our minds as they have control over materialistic aspects of our lives. She calls colonial "Gods", as they want to regulate Indians according to their plans. They try to take hold of the land and of its inhabitants, "*Here Gods roam freely / Disguised as snake or monkeys*" (Bhatt, lines 4-5)

She uses the word "disguised" deliberately because British colonizers came to India in a disguised manner. They impose that they are here for the sake of business but they have very negative intentions. Shujta Bhatt uses the symbol of "snake or monkeys" because these Colonizers are as dangerous as "snakes". Their poison is deadly to the inhabitants of India, but now Indians are aware of them. The word "monkeys" is used because monkeys are famous for imitation. They just pretend that they are like us, they are normal human beings but in their real form, these Colonizers are cruel and brutal like beasts. She says that

we are the producers of the books and so we are aware of their maintenance. Here she reclaims her rich and civilized past (pre-colonial era). She wants to say that we have our literature which is fascinating to you (colonizers) as well. It shows our cultural richness. We do not need you people or your culture to protect us and our land, "*And it is sin / To be rude to be a book / It is a sin to shave a book a side / With your foot*" (Bhatt, lines 6-9)

Here book can be taken as a colonized nation and this stanza presents the mental sickness of colonizers. They only respect their own "book", and their religion, and treat all other religions as inferior, claiming their supremacy. But Shujta Bhatt says we are superior actually and our rich land and beautiful culture attract you to come here. She claims very beautifully that we are actually the producers and you come here to take advantage of us. She symbolizes her nation with a tree and says that all pages of books are made by us. So you should not degrade us. You must admit our worth, "*Without offending the tree / From whose wood paper was made*" (Bhatt, lines 16-17). Sartre classified this colonial movement as springing from the intellectual conditioning of the mother culture (Ibid: 135). Shujta is trying to relate her identity with her motherland and mother culture. Instead of just lamenting on impact of colonialism, she tries to invoke a spirit of self-love among her people that will make them able to fight against those impacts that are still present on her land.

She also criticized the use of the colonizers' language which is against the standard version of their English language. She calls that language an "*oppressor's tongue*". In her view, this language is used to make Indians oppressed but on the same side, she explains the fear of British colonizers. She says that they are afraid of us. In their unconscious, they are aware of our intellectual powers so they have to disguise themselves. In other words, Shujta Bhatt intellectually exposes their superiority complex. She has successfully explained the purpose of colonizers and wants her nation to regain its pride by realizing its real worth. Second poem is by Oodegeroo Noonuccal an aboriginal poetess. She was an active participant in the Communist Party of Australia. Here we will analyze her famous poem. "*The Dispossessed*" in her poem she discusses the harms of colonization and she says that Australia would be better without colonization. In her poem, she keeps her tone very resentful and negative towards colonizers but again like Shujta Bhatt, her purpose is also to make her people realize their value which has been lost due to colonizers. Her communist party of Australia was the only political party of her time that did not support the "*White Australia Policy*" which showed her hatred for colonizers and their so-called civilized policies. "*Peace was yours, Australian man, / with tribal laws you made*" (Noonuccal, lines 1-2).

Here she uses the verb "*Was*" which means she laments colonization, and is of the view that "*peace*" and happiness have been lost now. It was just a matter of a beautiful past when we were free to move on land and act according to our laws. The phrase "*with tribal laws you made*" shows that she is reclaiming her nation's strong administrative bases. They had their laws but when we look into colonizers' discourse, they claim to have introduced laws and rules of living and administration to these colonized lands. This phrase is a kind of rejection of that false discourse of colonizers. The colonizer's discourse never highlighted or even admitted this kind of development in those lands in pre-colonial times. In their view, the colonized are brutal and uncivilized but actually, they are civilized nations. So Noonuccal represents them in these lines

"*White colonials stole your peace with rape and murder rape*" (Noonuccal, lines 3-4). Mostly such traits are associated with colonized people but here the colonized are writing back to the center and showing them their real faces. She highlights the wrong done by colonizers to her land. She rejects the rules and laws of whites. "*Your tribes are broken*

*vagrants now / wherever whites abide*" (Noonuccal, lines 13-14). Unity is the basic element to make the foundations of a nation stronger and stronger and these colonizers are applying the trick of "divide and rule". They are hitting the foundations of her nation, " *and justice of white man / means justice to you denied*" (Noonuccal, lines 15-16). In the above lines, the poet highlights the dual meaning of justice for colonizers. She unmasks the cunning nature and brutal face of these colonizers as they claim that they are the torch bearers for these lands but they have some private aims. They announced to bring justice for them, but their Justice means a unjust attitude towards natives. As said by Bill Ashcroft in his book *Empire* writes back that these empires were exotic for them. Capitalism was introduced by them because they had control over the capital of these lands. They hide their real motives in the guise of capitalism. " *They made you work as menials / for greedy private gains*" (Noonuccal, lines 11-12). Through these lines, she wants to bring the real face of colonizers in front of her Nation and wants to make her nation realize that they have a glorious past. They have to look back into their foundations and idealize the time when "Peace was yours". "The development of national pieces of literature and criticism fundamental to the whole enterprise of past colonial studies" (Ashcroft, 16). This poem is evidence of this fact. To reject the center's importance, post-colonial writers have to disclose the dirty motives of that so-called center and then give light to their strengths, " *they bought you Bibles and disease the liquor and the gun*" (Noonuccal, lines 17-18).

Before colonialism in Australia, Australians were living happily without having a fixed religion of Christianity. Here poetess points out their religion. She says that they brought all that equipment with them which is enough to break their unity. She compares the "bible" and "disease", " *white and dark as brother find equality and peace*" (Noonuccal lines 31-32)

"A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or voluntary removal for indentured labor" (Ashcroft et al 9). When the natives are treated as outcasts in their land, it is a kind of dislocation because though they have not migrated physically from the place their identities are dislocated. This is the cruelest part of colonialism, " *outcast in your native land*" (Noonuccal, line 23). Their culture is also displaced and dislocated when colonizers invade their land. The most heart-touching line of the poem is " *you are the dispossessed*" (Noonuccal line 24). Here Oodegeroo Noonuccal wants to make her people aware of their present worth and compare it with their value in pre Colonial era.

The third poem is Langston Hughes's "The Negro speaks of River" This poem is a clear example of *Self apprehension*. In this poem, Hughes uses the pronoun "I" which represents his whole nation or African race. This "I" is universal that spans time and space. Hughes claims that this "I" is aware of ancient civilization and has knowledge older than human blood. Colonizers had declared these colored skins as subaltern but Hughes shows through his poem how rich their civilization is, " *I've known rivers ancient as the world and older / Than Flow of human blood in human veins*" (Hughes, lines 1-3) in this poem poet gives references of different ancient rivers. The river is a voice of African people who were forced into slavery, including the time of Abraham Lincoln. He talks about different ancient rivers and their activities near Euphrates, Congo, and Nile. This poem shows Hughes's pride in his heritage and also reflects his philosophical approach. He gives clues about the origin and historical existence of the African race, " *my soul has grown deep like rivers*" (Hughes, line 4). Here river shows the deep attachment of Africans to knowledge. So he tries to reject the Colonial claim that these colored skins have no heritage or civilization by providing evidence from history. In his book *In Theory: Classes, Nations Literature*, Ahmed (1920) suggests that the only way to resist colonialism intellectually is to return to the roots of nationalism, " *I heard the singing of the Mississippi / When Abe Lincoln went down to New*

*Orleans*" (Hughes, lines 8-9). These lines refer to that famous trip Lincoln took to Mississippi, which exposed him to the evils of slavery. This example is deliberately included in the poem to show the breadth of the black experience. He argues that our black race is so powerful that we can cross the gaps that slavery created and reconnect with our lost ancestors and traditions. So overall this poem proudly portrays the depth of black historical experience.

### **Conclusion**

Literature in colonial times was under the direct control of the imperial ruling class so no such kind of literature could be produced that could capture and exhibit the true picture of natives. This aim is achieved through Post-Colonial writings. They try to break the so-called standard version of colonial discourse and highlight their importance in the universal Canon. Shujta Bhatt's poem "A Different History" shows the history of India which was always masked by colonial powers. She exposes the cunning face of British colonizers. Hence she writes back to colonizers a different history of India. Oodgeroo Noonuccal in her poem "The dispossessed" shows how the real inhabitants of Australia are being dispossessed and they are treated as outcasts in their land. She expresses her anger towards white colonizers and calls them robbers who stole their peace and harmony. They sow the seeds of anger in them and try to weaken the foundations of their nation. In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" Hughes claims his rich cultural heritage which was misrepresented by colonizers. Hence in post-colonial writings, these writers try to reclaim their past and manifest their real worth to the world.

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