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RESEARCH PAPER

A Postcolonial Study of Marxism as a Speculative Other in Tariq Rehman's Short Stories *Mai Baap* and *The Zoo*

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonialism, in recent years, tends to subvert dominant ideological discourses in order to dismantle the Eurocentric epistemological constructions. In this context, Postcolonialism engages itself with Marxism as a metanarrative, a speculative Other. Postcolonialism, in order to contest Western hegemony, intersects with Postmodernism as unified ideological discourses with skepticism and hence, maintain notion of difference within the notion of emancipation. The study deals with Tariq Rahman's engagement with deconstructing the political epistemology of Marxism as a speculative Other. Rahman, through his short stories, tends to emphasize upon the study of cultural essentialism to pinpoint its merger with Postcolonial studies to shatter the universalistic binary representations of Self/Other and hence, problematizes Postcolonial identity. The major concern of the study is to question the hegemonic construct of modernist Marxism. Thus, Rahman through his stories extends disbelief towards the globalizing and unifying dispositions of Marxism as a speculative culture of the colonizer cum neocolonizer.

KEYWORDS Marxism, Metanarrative, Neo-Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Self/Other, **Introduction**

The Third Leg and other Short Stories (1999) by Tariq Rahman is a collection of short stories, which comprises of twenty-four short stories. Though the narrative style of the stories is quite simple but the themes are quite realistic, philosophical and symbolic in nature. Most of the stories in the collection revolve around themes of social equality and justice, subverting racial biases and the hegemony of elitist class. At times, the binary opposition of oppressor v/s oppressed becomes instable as both sides are portrayed facing existential crisis of compulsion-moral or social. The stories not only figure out social inequalities but also tend to provide a deeper understanding and a visionary insight into human psychology. The study tends to explore the implicit hegemony within Marxism as a totalitarian discourse in Postcolonial context. Moreover, it tends to pinpoint that how Marxism acts as a speculative Other of the colonizer and neo-colonizer regarding freedom and progress.

The present research focuses upon two major points. First, this research takes a starting point Rahman's short stories having a skeptic stance towards Marxism as a unified discourse to bring an overarching progress. It tends to create a hegemony not only at the social level but also at the speculative level; second, the purpose of this

research is to link my reading of Tariq Rahman short stories with Postcolonial Marxist approach in order to provide a genealogy of Marxism as a speculative discourse.

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in Postcolonial studies particularly through its skepticism towards Eurocentric ideological discourses, which, in turn essentializes the experience of individuals at the margins. Therefore, significant works have been done on Rahman's short fiction particularly from the perspective of structuralist and poststructuralist approach (Ansari & Lashari, 2019) and history of Pakistani literature in English (Hashmi, 1993). My study is unique as it tends to link Marxist ideology with identity crisis of the neo-colonized in Postcolonial context. Moreover, the issue of Postcolonial Marxism has not been explored in Tariq Rahman's short stories in *The Third Leg and other Short Stories* (1999). The present research presents a concise sketch, a methodology used in research followed by research questions and theoretical ideas. For this research a comparative analysis of the two short stories *Mai Baap* and *The Zoo* has been carried out in order to maintain a stance that how Marxism is a hegemonic discourse, which creates a corroded sense of Self of the colonized as well as neo-colonized in Postcolonial context.

Material and Methods

The present research is non-empirical as the researcher intends to apply Postcolonial Marxist theory on Tariq Rahman's short stories. The research employs interpretative paradigm with its focus on socio-historic context of the given text. Moreover, the technique used for contextual analysis is cloze reading of the selected text as the paper intends to address what the text signifies with logical inferences, citing significant references from the text in order to support conclusion and findings drawn from the text (Lapp et al., 2015). Hence, the paper tries to juxtapose Postcolonial Marxist theory with the text to problematize the notion of Marxism as a unified epistemology with universal claim for human progress in a Postcolonial context. The two selected stories *Mai Baap* and *The Zoo* in Rahman's's collection *The Third Leg and other Short stories* (1999) are chosen for their Postcolonial Marxist stance towards the representation of Self/Other in a Postcolonial world.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Chibber (2013) talks about Postcolonialism in conflation with Marxism as a form of "radical critique" and hence, points out its "theoretical inadequacies" in the form of skepticism towards Marxism as a laboratory movement. According to him, the world has transcended the notion of "historical materialism" around which the ideology of Marxism revolves respectively. He significantly maintains the position of Postcolonial theory in relation to Marxism as the former resists or subverts any form of ideology, which seeks refuge in unification, which Chibber (2013) calls "internal coherence and systematicity" (Chibber, 2013). Moreover, according to him, the merger of Postcolonial studies with Marxism tends to present a "critique of Eurocentrism, nationalism ("the nation form"), colonial ideology, and economic determinism" (chibber, 2013). in order to reinstate East and not only its cultural but also the intellectual needs at the center.

Postcolonialism converges with Postmodernism in order to lend its skepticism towards totalizing narratives rather the 'metanarratives' which claim universal progress. In this context, Lyotard (1984) talks about speculative metanarratives through taking a Poststructuralist stance towards unified epistemological constructions as "absolute". According to Lyotard, the nature of knowledge is no longer unified because of its multiplicity in postmodern world. Moreover, Lyotard explains that narratives are not

mere set of knowledge(s) but also ideological sites where they get legitimization in the form of social systems and beliefs, which include History that constructs narratives of the past, Psychology that tells stories about the Self or Sociology that depicts different social formations and their effects on individuals (Malpas, 2003).

Loomba (1998) talks about indirect colonial rule in the form of neo- colonization or neo-imperialism, which exists in a nascent state in Postcolonial world. According to her, this is the "highest stage of colonialism" which has displaced the former modes of colonization and hence, involves a continuous tension between the first and third world countries. She significantly draws a parallel between postcolonialism and neocolonialism in order to signify the "economic, cultural and (to varying degrees) political penetration of some countries by others." (Loomba, 1998). Moreover, according to her, these novel forms of colonization manipulate human knowledge centered in binaristic constructions of Self/Other. It not only tends to marginalize the knowledge(s) generated at the peripheries but also creates ambivalence within the pure constructions of Self and Other, which is termed as hybridity by Bhaba (1994).

Fanon (1967) significantly talks about the subjugated rather the oppressed condition of colonized as well as neo-colonized individuals in the form of speculative hegemony exercised by West. In this context, Fanon appropriates Lacanian notion of Other for the non-whites who is the 'not self' for the white man. On the other hand, the same is true for the black man for whom Other is the white man who is "not only the Other, but also the master, real or imaginary". In this way, Fanon talks about the nascent hegemony exercised by West in the form of speculative oppression and colonization. For Bhaba (1994), Postcolonial identities are always in a state of anxiety because they can never attain the taught desire of whiteness and can never shed blackness, which they have learnt to devalue. Hence, the study of Self/Other becomes problematic in colonial and Postcolonial context.

Foucault (1998), in this regard, talks about economic and political modalities of subjugated identities in order to take a skeptic stance towards Marxism as a salvationist discourse. According to Foucault, subjugation establishes the primary ground of production, which is strategic, diffuse and multiple. In this respect, he brings the metonym of Panopticism to the forefront in order to subvert the speculative hegemony and domination as a result of 'gaze', which creates a permanent invisible visibility for trapping individuals under a constant sense of surveillance. For Foucault, Panopticon stands for any discourse which claim universal progress as such discourses centralizes knowledge within fixed epistemological grounds. Moreover, the metonym of Panopticon is relevant regarding the notion of speculative hegemony as the individuals under the surveillance creates a fictive relation. With the observer, which in turn blurs the "seen/being seen dyad" which is the same case for ideological positions as ideologies keep their followers under their observance which no matter creates a fictive but hegemonic relation between the ideology makers and their retainers in Postcolonial world.

Postcolonialism, in fusion with Postmodernism, subverts the ideological positions through various techniques. One of the significant techniques is Foucault's (1977) genealogical analysis which is mainly inspired by the negation of Utopian ideals of history and its various narratives. In this regard, Foucault being a genealogist deconstructs the Platonic modalities of history and hence, extends his skepticism towards the traditional notion of progress through pointing out the cyclical nature of history, which leads individuals from one form of subjugation to another. Another significant technique is historiographic metafiction, which entails the blurring of

boundaries of history and fiction in order to identify and subvert the political fabrications of historical representations.

Results and Discussion

Structural Analysis of Mai Baap and The Zoo

The short story is a piece of fiction, which is far more concise and short as compared to the novel. Usually, it revolves around a single action with one main protagonist along with minor characters who contribute to the development of the story. The structural analysis of short story mainly comprises of the analysis at the level of setting, characterization, plot and structure, narrator and point of view, conflict, climax, theme and style.

Mai Baap (1999) is a short story by Tariq Rahman, which revolves around the social and historical conditions of Bengal famine during the British Raj. Khalid Khan, the Indian Civil servant, who finds himself in a dilemma when posted to Bengal surrounded by starving Bengalis. The story mainly reflects the atrocities of the British Raj during the colonial period.

As far as the setting and plot of the story is concerned, it takes place in Bengal when it is suffering with famine during the British Raj. The story is written in first person narration, which gives the story a style of dramatic monologue and starts with the description of the nature of Indian civil services and its responsibilities in Bengal during the colonial period. Khalid Khan is assigned a task by the English Collector of the district of protecting godown of rice from the starving Bengalis of the district during the course of the story. The story ends with the visit of the Indian Viceroy and Colonel Armstrong's admonition to Khalid Khan not to be merciful for the dying Bengalis. Hence, the story starts with the description of famine and ends on the same note of British brutality. The setting plays an important role in the development of plot and theme as the story captures the brutalities of the British Raj during the colonial period in Bengal. The time period of colonial era in the short story also determines the language used in the story. The writer has used the expressions of Urdu language like Mai Baap, Khana Lagao, Jo Hukm Sahib, Sirkar, not only to relate the literacy level of the layman during the colonial period in Bengal but also the relation between the English masters as the colonizers and the Bengalis, the colonized.

The main character of the story is Khalid Khan who is the Indian civil servant. The other minor characters are Captain Ralph Smith, Mr. John Fitzgerald, the Collector of the district, Colonel Armstrong and the Indian Viceroy Field Marshal Lord Wavell. The characters though dynamic contributing to the development of story, show no tendency for change, as the characters remain same throughout the story. The characters on the surface level seem to be stereotypes in a sense as they represent master/slave binary particularly through the power relation between the whites and the non-whites. The main character Khalid Khan in the beginning of the story, finds himself in a conflict when he witnesses the cruelties of the Whites being a civil servant under the British Raj.

The Zoo (1999) is also a short story by Tariq Rahman, written in third person narration, which establishes not only a stark contrast between urban and rural life but also depicts the social problems of the former in a realistic manner. Hashmat Ali with his wife Fatima along with their children face the brutalities of city life where animals are more privileged than humans which is a contrast developed by the writer to mock human existence. As far as setting and plot of the story is concerned, the main action

takes place in Lahore where Hashmat Ali, who is basically an agricultural farmer, intends to settle in with his family. Hashmat Ali in the beginning finds a very humble job of carrying people's luggage on railway station but ultimately finds a reasonable job as a gardener in the nearby school. Fatima misses the village life, its green fields due to the despicable condition of her house in the city. The story ends after their visit to the zoo in their one room house contemplating upon the luxurious life animals have in the city zoo. The story almost starts with the description of the miserable condition of Hashmat and his family and ends on the same note with the dark life in their lone dormitory. The story has a sub plot as well in the beginning of the story where Ikram Arif is given the responsibility and funds to construct a zoo. The function of this sub plot is to develop a contrast between the existence of humans versus animals in order to question the vanity of bourgeois class which benefit animals more than humans. The setting plays an important role in the story as the writer through setting establishes a sharp contrast between the bourgeois and the proletariat class and hence, mocks the vanity of the ruling class.

The main character of the story is Hashmat Ali who belongs to the rural background and aspires to live an affluent life in the city. The other minor characters are Fatima, the wife of Hashmat Ali and the children of Hashmat and Fatima, Azmat and Zainab. The characters though dynamic contributing to the development of plot remains in poverty throughout the story. The characters on the surface level are stereotypes in a sense, as they seem to represent the demarcation between the privileged and the non-privileged class of Pakistani society. The conflict arises when the protagonist of the story takes his family to a zoo and they encounter an ironic difference between their existence as cheap and the animals as comfortable and luxurious respectively.

Thematic Analysis of Mai Baap and The Zoo: Marxism as a Speculative Other

Mai Baap (1999) by Tarig Rahman is a story which is primarily based on the power relations between the Whites as the colonizers and the Bengalis as the colonized during British regime in the subcontinent. The story revolves around the economic crisis in Bengal as a result of famine during the British Raj. The name of the story plays a significant role in displaying a skeptic attitude towards Marxism as a salvationist discourse. Mai Baap stands as a metonym for Eurocentrism, a colonial ideology, which make the Whites as the supreme masters who can bring ultimate salvation to humanity particularly to the non-whites who cannot take control of their existential realities. Moreover, the colonized cannot even take care of their intellectual needs in the presence of the colonizer, as they happen to be the ultimate masters of their physical as well as their intellectual world. Mai Baap is a word in Urdu, which stands for both mother and father signifying multiple connotations. On one hand, Mai Baap is a savior who is responsible for the benefits of his/her inferiors. On the other hand, it also stands for a master who owns the life of his/her servants. In the story, the Indian Viceroy Field Marshal Lord Wavell states the ideological hegemony of Marxism over the poor Bengalis by labeling Whites as Mai Baap, "the sustainer" responsible for the economic needs of the non-whites who are the Bengalis in the story. When the Viceroy blessed the "emaciated children with their sunken cheekbones and drum-like bellies" with pastries, he states:

"It is good to be generous. After all they looked upon us as father and mother — the sustainer — *mai baap...*" (Rahman, 1999, p. 12)

Mai Baap as a metonym stands for Marxism as a speculative Other as Marxism is an ideology, a legitimized social belief, which claims progress for the entire humanity without taking into account social, cultural and political differences. Mai Baap not only stands for the existence of Whites as colonizers in the story but Mai Baap also signifies livelihood, survival and sustenance without which human existence is not possible. Rahman takes a Poststructuralist stance towards the metonym of Mai Baap as it is an instable signifier with multiple meanings and hence, Mai Baap itself is not an absolute entity. The way Bengalis during famine are portrayed depicts not only their physical oppression in the form of master/slave dialectic but also their psychological state in which the ultimate Mai Baap is the Marxist ideology, the achievement of the means needed to support life. Khalid Khan makes his first encounter with starving Bengalis in the story and realizes that the only stark reality or necessity for them is to escape the pain of hunger during famine. On one occasion, he followed dying Bengalis to their huts and found them fighting for the mere pieces of bread with "fanatical energy". Moreover, he found one man dead because of lack of food. The narrator depicts the despicable condition of Bengalis through the eyes of Khalid Khan as,

> "I understood that he had died of starvation, or lack of *bhat*, which I knew was Bengali for rice... While this was going on young balloon-bellied children fought over crumbs. "(Rahman, 1999, p.124)

Rahman (1999), in the story, intends to pinpoint the existence of the non-whites in a Panopticon established by Whites in the form of Marxist speculative hegemony. The Whites in the story are the masters, the Mai Baap, responsible for the existential maintenance of the non-whites. The British Raj, in the story, exercises its hegemony in the form of constant surveillance trapping individuals under a continuous sense of 'gaze', an invisible visibility, in order to create a strategic and multidimensional mode of observance on the colonized. Khalid Khan, being a Deputy collector under the Collector of the district Mr. John Fitzgerald, is portrayed under a continuous speculative hegemony of Whites. The Collector of the district, while giving instructions to Khalid Khan in order to protect rice from the starving Bengalis, orders him in an implicit way not to have long walks in the area due to "Too many miserable beggars whining for rice" (ibid., p.125). The protagonist of the story, though a deputy Collector, is not without under a sense of observance, as he is made "responsible for the safety of the godown" (ibid). Colonel Armstrong authenticates the presence of this invisible visibility in the form of cases of Indian officers "who have given away rice to unauthorized people" (ibid., p.130). Moreover, Khalid Khan is also depicted as under ideological hegemony as he is the Mai Baap the Sirkar, the keeper of godown and hence, the upholder of the existence of Bengalis which is the underlying notion of Marxist ideology as Salvationist discourse. Khalid Khan relates the amazement of English youth when they call them "mai baap" or "sirkar".

> "'My God', they would exclaim, 'But how can I be the father of this man who is at least ninety...'And how do you explain being a mother as well'." (Rahman, 1999, p.122)

The story *Mai Baap* strongly pertains to Fanon's notion of Lacanian Other as Bengalis for the Whites are shown to be inhuman entities as they treat them during famine in a very brutal manner. The way British treat Bengalis during famine becomes evident when the English do not pay a heed to protesting Bengalis and one man lost his life during a riot. Moreover, on one hand, the protagonist of the story suffers from identity crisis as he is an Indian Civil servant with a lifestyle like English in the subcontinent, a graduate of Trinity College Cambridge like the Collector of the district, Mr. John Fitzgerald and considers British as his supreme master. On the other hand, he shows a speculative resistance towards the orders of his British masters and inadvertently feels sympathy for the Bengalis. When the old man asked for mercy for his fellow Bengalis after being caught stealing the leftovers, Khalid Khan felt "dazed and sick" (Rahman, 1999, p.125) for the oppressed ones. Furthermore, when Mr. John Fitzgerald commands Khalid Khan to deny the food to both enemy and Bengalis and protect godown at any cost, he assures him that he will obey his orders but "without conviction" (Rahman, 1999, p.126) which clearly shows his reluctance towards white masters.

The Zoo (1999) by Rahman exposes Eurocentrism in the story in the form of sub plot in the beginning where the main motive behind the construction of the zoo is to please the foreigners, the White masters. The hegemony of Marxism as a Eurocentric ideology is significantly portrayed as the "foreigners" or the Whites through the colonial ideology in the form of Marxist ideal of bringing salvation to the peripheries has been pointed out in the story when the Governor is interested in his own personal benefits because if he constructs zoo on his barren lands, the White master not only bestows financial benefits to the layman but also to the Governor as well. Moreover, the peripheries cannot take control of their intellectual and physical needs as "Austrian firm" is assigned the task of assigning "appropriate landscape for different types of animals" (Rahman, 1999, p.9).

Rahman (1999) in the story The Zoo significantly points out the nature of neocolonialism where ironically the speculative Other is Marxist ideology of emancipation in order to get rid of oppression. This oppression on the protagonist though speculative is a new or 'neo' mode of slavery, which involves an ideological tension between the oppressor and the oppressed as the oppressor is Marxist ideology of progress. Moreover, this tension leads towards the identity crisis of Hashmat in a neo-colonial world and hence, deconstructs the binaristic representation of Self/Other. The Other for the white man is the black man who is Hashmat in the story devoid of individual identity whereas the Other for the black man is the master or any ideology created by the master which is the unified epistemology of Marxism in the story. For Hashmat, during the entire story, the Marxist ideology of liberation remains the speculative and emancipatory ideal. He moves from village to city life in search of a progressive urbanized life. He does everything to secure a good living in the city including carrying "people's luggage to waiting taxies and rickshaws at the railway station" (Rahman, 1999, p.10). He suffers more due to speculative or psychological oppression of economic difference and does not want his children to be "laborers". He knows well that if he wants his daughter to get married to an educated boy "she had to go to the school" (Rahman, 1999, p.11) which is symbolic of his desire to climb the ladder of social hierarchy in no time.

Rahman (1999) through *The Zoo* establishes a Marxist Panopticon and extends his skepticism towards Marxism as a salvationist discourse in the form of speculative and oppressive 'gaze' when Fatima, the wife of Hashmat, along with the kids visit the zoo. Fatima feels herself under the surveillance of Marxist ideology when she unconsciously compares her life with the animals in the zoo as she observes that animals are more privileged and well accommodated in comparison with humans. Previously, she comments on her living as if "...we are suspended somewhere. It is not like being on the

earth." (Rahman, 1999, p.12) whereas in the zoo the animals have vast green fields where "zebras grazed quietly" ((Rahman, 1999, p.13). To their amazement, the bears enjoy "pure honey" and monkeys live in "... a huge area with trees, swings and ropes" enjoying " apples, guavas and radishes." (Rahman, 1999, p.14). The hegemony of Marxist ideal of progress is highlighted with the question of Azmat when he asks his father while leaving for their house "Will they sleep in these lovely wooden huts" (Rahman, 1999, p. 14) which is symbolic of not only the existential crisis of the oppressed class but also an ironic comment on the vanity of the elitist class. The story also ends with a sense of invisible visibility of Marxist surveillance when Fatima describes her house where "the sun would never shine nor would the stars ever be visible" (Rahman, 1999) in comparison with the zoo "... thinking about the stars which would be twinkling at the monkeys." (Rahman, 1999)

Comparison between the stories of Tariq Rahman: Mai Baap and The Zoo

Mai Baap is a story by Rahman, which has one main plot revolving around the famine in Bengal during the British Raj with Khalid Khan as the protagonist of the story whereas *The Zoo* has one main plot with Hashmat as the protagonist of the story along with one subplot, which consists of an issue of the construction of zoo. The characters in both stories do not show any explicit tendency towards change and hence, flat but dynamic characters. *Mai Baap* is written in first person, which gives the story a style of dramatic monologue whereas *The Zoo* is written in third person narration, a story by an omniscient narrator. As far as the setting of the two stories are concerned, *Mai Baap* is set in the colonial period of British Raj whereas *The Zoo* is set in a neo-colonial period.

The two stories exhibit a common theme of Marxism as a speculative Other where the characters find themselves under the speculative hegemony of Marxism as a liberatory discourse. In this context, Foucault's notion of genealogical analysis of history is significant because it tends to dismantle the Platonic modalities of history where the narrative of history is taken through the perspective of progress. The above mentioned stories lends their skepticism towards history as a narrative of progress in a way as the two stories are the significant descriptions of the progression of individuals from one form of subjugation to another form of subjugation respectively. From Khalid Khan in Mai Baap to Hashmat Ali in The Zoo, Rahman significantly shatters the unified epistemology of Marxism as a Salvationist discourse as Khalid Khan through his voice depicts oppression on individuals during the colonial era of British Raj where the people are deprived of food whereas Hashmat Ali through his character portrays oppression on individuals during the neo-colonial period where the class difference plays an important role in maintaining the hegemony of Eurocentric ideologies like Marxism. Moreover, through Mai Baap Rahman blurs the boundaries of history and fiction as the story revolves around the actual condition of Bengal famine during colonial period in order to subvert the political fabrications of historical representations where the master and their savior ideologies like Marxism can lead individuals towards progress.

Conclusion

To conclude, Rahman through his stories *Mai* Baap and *The Zoo* tries to dismantle the hegemonic ideal of Marxism as a Salvationist ideological epistemology. Through *Mai Baap*, Rahman exposes the atrocities of the British Raj in the form of colonial rule of the English where the British masters as beholders or sustainers of Bengalis existence fails to bring salvation to suffering humanity. But ironically during the entire colonial period, the Whites stay as the Mai Baap, the sustainers maintaining the Panopticon of Marxist speculative ideological hegemony resulting in identity crisis of individuals. On the other hand, *The Zoo* by Rahman dislocates the Eurocentric Marxist ideology of emancipation through pinpointing the oppression on individuals in a neo-colonial context where the neo-colonized is always in a state of anxiety because of the class difference as Marxism stands as a Panopticon and a speculative emancipatory Other in a neo-colonial world and hence, problematizes and destabilizes the identity of individuals in the form of binaristic representation of Self/Other. Moreover, the genealogical analysis of the two stories dismantles the historical representation of Marxism as individuals are portrayed under Marxist hegemony both during the colonial and neo-colonial rule, which ultimately shatters Marxism as a Salvationist discourse.

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