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A STUDY OF THE TRAJECTORY OF SUBALTERN WITH REFERENCE TO THE NOVEL 'AFTERLIVES' BY ABDULRAZAK GURNAH

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Abstract: The impact of colonialism changes the lives of colonised people upside down. East Africa no longer remained their own and have no land of their own. Their fate and destiny were decided by the colonisers. The present paper presents the wretched conditions of the major characters of the native East Africans and the displacement of their soul and body by the German colonizers. The paper discusses the major aspects associated with the problems of the subaltern as reflected in the novel. The study also brings to light the impact of colonization, the problems of immigration, refugees, and racism in general.

Index Terms: Colonialism, displacement, immigration, Africans, and Germans.

There has been a long tradition of authors belonging to the colonized countries writing about the aftermath of the colonization. The analysis and depiction of these writers focus on the various social, political, cultural, and economic aspects impacted due to the colonizers' power. These writings brought to light the lives of the oppressed and marginalized by the colonizers, especially Europeans. All these authors mostly are from third-world countries especially African and Asian authors who are prominent in postcolonial writings. The prominent amongst them are Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak and most acclaimed Edward Said. The writings provided the platform to voice those people who were oppressed and voiceless during the era of colonization by Europeans. Italian Marxist Antonino Gramsci used the term subaltern to mean 'something of low rank' or people who do not have hegemonic power. Gramsci used this term to describe Soviet Union peasants and working-class people who remained outside of the sphere of the power structures which was mostly owned by hegemonic classes of the society.

The mainstream writings recorded the history and perspectives of the colonizers who overlooked the basic human rights of the colonized. The writings of these third-world countries paved the way for raising their voices and experiences which remained oppressed and marginalized. East Africa and especially Tanzania was also not an exception to this state affair as the nation was ruled by Germans. There was a fight amongst the Germans, British, French, Portuguese, and Belgians to rule the maps of the various African countries. The atrocities and oppression of millions found their depiction in the writings of these subaltern writers who could rebel against the attitude, ideologies, and belief systems of colonizers. The impact of colonization remained so powerful and everlasting that it has become an integral part of the cultural, social, and economic aspects of these countries forever. The intellectual investigation of the writers of these countries revolves around the memories of bloodshed, rebellion, and oppression by the colonizers.

The novel 'Afterlives' (2020) by Tanzanian-British Nobel Laureate Novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah finds its expression against the background of the colonization of Tanzania and the depiction of some unknown town in east Africa. The novel depicts the lives of the major characters of Khalifa, Ilyas, Asha, Amur, and Afiya who were the victims of colonization and its ugly atrocities. The estrangement of all these young characters from their parents at an early age made a remarkable impact on their lives and they suffered throughout their lives because of the colonization. The colonization devastated their lives and made them orphanages and sold for the slavery of colonizers. Abdulrazak Gurnah is known for his depiction of slavery, bloodshed, starvation, estrangement, and displacement in his various novels. The characters are not directly the victims of bloodshed, but the plot develops with the background of competition of colonization before World War-I (1914-1918). Hamza, another major character who later marries Ilyas's sister Afiya joins the war from the Germans and there was the little depiction of military atrocities by the author.

The subaltern is not always destined to be displaced but in the case of the people of east Africa had been sold and were taken to different regions to work on the behalf of the Europeans as slaves. Ilyas was kidnapped by German colonial troops and sent to the German mission

school. The entire novel revolves around the central character of Ilyas who was not aware of the whereabouts of his parents and relatives as was displaced due to kidnapping by Europeans. The forced displacement brought a lot of hardships to these people who had to leave everything behind and start their lives fresh. They provided inhuman treatment to these colonized people which took away everything from them. 'Did they make you pray like a Christian?' Khalifa asked (Gurnah, 2020, p.27) this to Ilyas when he was taken away by the Europeans. This shows that their fundamental rights were ruined completely by the colonizers. The colonizers did not even spare the faith of the people, irrespective of their religion and faith, they sold them and created the impression that they were there to rule this black race.

The marginalization and oppressiveness of the people of East Africa under the dominion of the German invaders can be observed from the lives described by the characters by Gurnah in the novel. Life was quite wretched and unbearable for East African people by the Europeans due to their policies of imperialism. 'You won't say anything to anyone if I tell you, will you?' he asked. 'They did,' Khalifa said delightedly. 'They made you sin.' 'Don't tell anyone,' Ilyas said pleadingly. 'It was either that or leave school, so I pretended. They were very pleased with me, and I knew God could see what was really in my heart.' (Gurnah, 2020, p.27) The conversation between Ilyas and Khalifa indicates the ordeal through which these colonizers have been gone. The terror created lasted forever not only on their bodies but also it remained permanently on their minds and souls. Ilyas worked on the Coffee farm owned by the Germans at an early age, but he says that he was lucky to get an education from the Germans who could bring about developments in East Africa. Gurnah has successfully described the lives of these people under the tyranny of colonizers and their ray of hope in the form of love stories depicted parallel against the miserable lives of colonized.

The oppressive life of the sister of Ilyas was not an exception in the novel though she was a teenager and got away from her parents at an early age. The life of Afiya, the sister of Ilyas has become torture like a hell for her due to the maltreatment meted out to her by the uncle in whose house she was grown up till the time Ilyas comes and rescues her from the clutches of the uncle. The condition of Afiya was a matter of toy for the son of her uncle as he and other children in the house used to beat her out of sheer pleasure and fun. She was not supposed to prevent and stop this harassment and torture by the children at home. She becomes so used to the harassment that she had no option but to bear it. She was an orphan child who did not know the whereabouts of her father and mother and if they were alive or not. When her uncle who was not her real uncle learnt that she has learnt to write and read, he started beating her profusely. He had broken her hand by beating her mercilessly as he was of the view that she should not be supposed to read and write, and it was not going to help her other than to be somebody's servant. When she is rescued from this ordeal and gets married to Hamza, she tells him, "Then she told him how her brother came back for her when she was ten years old when she did not even know she had a brother, how she lived with him for a year and he taught her to read and write, and then he went off to war." (Gurnah, 2020, p.209)

Abdulrazak Gurnah has tried to deconstruct the lives of the East African people under the German invaders to give voice to them. He employed the techniques to narrate the events of the novel in such a way that it provides an in-depth understanding of the wretched lives of the people under European rule. The consciousness of the people of East Africa is so repressed that they were not aware of their conditions, and they started thinking about their welfare of them under the dominion of German invaders who according to them are good people. They believed they could get a good education and the development and growth of their country was the culmination of the rule of the German aggressors. Gayatri Spivak rightly highlighted that the depiction and providing a voice to the characters is a positivistic project by which the dormant consciousness of the people may recover. The realization of the plight of the people by them proved to be the crucial aspect of recovering the consciousness of the East African people.

To investigate, discover and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project- a project which assumes that if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to something that can be disclosed. This is all the more significant in the case of recovering consciousness. (Spivak, 1988, p. 278)

Abdulrazak Gurnah lived had been living in England, but the stresses of the colonial experiences proved to be a witch-hunt for him that he could no longer get rid of it. The colonizers' impact is so powerful on the lives of East African people that they do not detach themselves from thinking of those experiences. The narrative of Abdulrazak Gurnah questions the cultural, social, and economic politics of the imperialism of the East African people under the rule of German aggression. He further attempts to deconstruct the gender, otherness and imperial relations established by the Europeans. The author preferably investigates the colonials and the colonizers rightfully from the modern perspectives of the colonial theory which questions the very existence of both.

"Post-colonial theory considers vexed cultural political questions of national and ethnic identity, otherness, race, imperialism, and language during and after the colonial periods. It draws upon post-structuralist theories such as those of deconstruction to unravel the complex relations between imperial centre and colonial periphery" (Baldick 265).

The author has succeeded in bringing contrasting lives as the ray of hope against the background of this colonial rule. The romantic lives of Afiya and Hamza and their son who was named after Ilyas showed the rising concerns for a better future for these East African people. The events which followed after the birth of Ilyas and his bringing up shows the improving conditions of East Africa under the British administration.

"The British administrators had no fear of guerrillas or bandits in this territory and could get on with the business of colonial administration without resistance from the colonised. Education and public health became their priorities. They made a big effort to inform people about health issues, train medical assistants and open dispensaries in far-flung parts of the colony. They distributed information leaflets and conducted tours by medical teams to instruct people on malaria prevention and good childcare. Afiya and Hamza listened to this new information and did what they could protect themselves and their child." (Gurnah, 2020, p.249)

Thus, the present papers gloss over the trajectory of the subaltern in the context of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel 'Afterlives'. The marginalization, oppressiveness, and otherness are thoroughly reflected in the novel. The author has presented the lives of the East African people under the regime of foreign rule, i.e., German rule. The problems of migration and refugees of the East African people are brought forth by the author though he is living far from his country.

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