

**NEO-COLONIAL CONNOTATIONS IN ACHEBE'S
ANTHILLS OF SAVANNAH AND ARUN JOSHI'S THE CITY AND THE RIVER**

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Abstract

In India and Nigeria the end of colonial rule was followed by Post-independence disappointments. Elites empowered with socio-economical, cultural and political edge of information and money colonised their own people resulting in neo-colonisation. Thus the nation's economy and culture was subjected to fresh profit-loss calculations mocking the very dream of 'decolonisation'. The onset of 'capitalist modernity'; incorporation of capitalist control in all social, cultural and economical configuration resulted in suppressing the subalterns of the country to voicelessness. The paper mainly aims to explore the context of neo-colonisation as portrayed in Chinua Achebe's Anthills of Savannah and Arun Joshi's The City and The River in the independent nation states of Nigeria and India respectively. Both the novels are a constant remainder of the historical contexts of oppression of the colonial period existing in post-colonial period also shattering the dream of an egalitarian society. They expose the oppressions and chauvinism of the military governments and its elite cabinet respectively. It is indeed essential to know what solutions the authors offer to counter or resist the perpetrators of neo-colonial situations. What progressive thinking they make towards building a true egalitarian nation state devoid of neo-colonial trends is indeed imperative in the era of globalisation.

Key words: Neo-colonization, Capitalism, elitism, populist inclusiveness, egalitarian society, globalisation

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If colonialism was a distinct geo-political phenomenon of nineteenth century, neo-colonialism is a geo-political postcolonial phenomenon. The postcolonial context of once colonised nations though implied an end to all things colonial, the neo-colonial forces continued to subsist and arise anew however with new name tags. That is in the immediate aftermath of the imperial rule the elites; the socio-culturally and economically empowered class, misused the downtrodden condition of the masses. Writers of colonised nations express acute apprehension of this development while rendering the postcolonial realities of their respective nations. Such subsistence they feel parodies both the idea and opportunities of independence and self-rule. In the current times of globalisation, in the prevailing global economic relations between countries, the wealthy Western nations and the developed nations take on the identity of the neo-colonial forces. They show lots of propensities for exploitation under the pretext of advancing trade and commerce. All the while in both the contexts of colonisation and globalisation, the agenda of economic profit was and is covertly and innately present. The outside agencies of power with little knowledge of the cultural 'Other', by intelligent strategies establish capitalist set-ups in varied forms, which ultimately turn out to be an indirect political control unlike the direct imperial hegemony of the colonisation times.

In all the colonised countries, the world over, the end of colonisation led to the euphoria of becoming independent nation states. It was thought of as the right time to literally live the democratic ideals of equality and fraternity. But disappointment ensued as one saw the fetishism of differences and the related politics therein prevailing acutely in independent nation states as well. With this the exhilaration of freedom came to an end resulting in post-independence disillusion. In the independent nation states native rulers' and elites empowered with socio-economical, cultural and political edge of information and money colonised their own people. Their exploitative manoeuvres dashed all hopes of an ideal nationhood imbued with egalitarian spirit. The neo-colonial contexts they generated forever damaged the fortunes of the independent nation states to literally live democratic ideal of equality. The most ironical of the fact is that the discourses of Marxism and Nationalism which had hitherto rendered hope and courage to fight the British colonisers failed to be of any service in opposing neo-colonial powers in the post-independent contexts. The history of colonised countries for the above reasons is best described as 'the

conceited story of the nation by conceited men' by Ranjit Guha. (132) He also coined the phrase 'Elite Historiography'(Guha,132) to explain the silencing of the 'subaltern' voices by the elites due to their autonomy over the nation's fortune and history. Thus in post-colonial times all kinds of asymmetrical relationships subsisted in once colonised nations due to power manipulations of neo-colonial forces.

The indirect and obscured nature of the political hegemony of neo-colonial power agents has little resistance as it is impossible to organise people against anything that is inconspicuous. Further the neo-colonial forces are better empowered to resist any opposition with the aid of modern media technologies; television, internet and the international multinational publishing houses. Thus the phenomenon of 'decolonisation' aimed at by anti-colonial movements has drastically failed and is reduced to a catchphrase of pseudo-hope today. Many commentators even routinely claim an unbridgeable divide between postcolonial and anti-colonial movements and Robert J.C. Young quotes Sartre disagreeing with difference between them thus 'represents a major theoretical pivot between them, undoing any easy differentiation and demonstrating the basis for their common political inheritance.' (ix) This claim of Sartre is a fine proof of the prevalence of link between post-colonialism and anti-colonialism very clearly.

Against the background of the hitherto discussed nuances of neo-colonialism the paper aims to trace the power politics as it existed in the independent nation states of Nigeria and India as portrayed in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of Savannah* and Arun Joshi's *The City and the River*. Both Nigeria and India are ex-colonies and the end of colonialism here culminated with assurance of realising democratic ideals. But in reality practices of inequality continued intact within these societies resulting in utter disappointment among the masses. Both these novels purport colonisation in Nigeria and India respectively by one's own people in post-colonial times. They portray the prevalence of the historical contexts of oppression of the colonial period in post-colonial period as well reducing the egalitarian ideals to a mockery. Both independent Nigeria and India witnessed the onset of 'capitalist modernity' (Ahmed, 10); incorporation of capitalist control in all social, cultural and economical configurations, suppressing the subalterns of the country to voicelessness. The exploitative politics practised by the power greedy generated an ambience of hopelessness and frustration. The elite cabinet and their hegemonic rule are the main causative in reducing the advantages of the self-rule to a mockery. The upper middle classes equipped with power weapons; socio-economical, cultural and political edge of information and money, neo-colonised their own people. Thus the economy and culture of these nations were subjected to fresh profit-loss calculations. Men with good educational

background and socio- political privilege so much dominated the scene that these few men became the representatives of the nation's collectivity.

John McLeod traces the exact time context of the writing of Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* as 'written at the time of growing disenchantment with the revolutionary ideals of anti-colonial nationalism' (22) in Nigeria. Arun Joshi's *The City and the River* though is not an immediate reaction to the changes perceived in the aftermath of the Indian independence yet is a political novel that reflects political reality of India of post-colonial times or for that matter of all historical time and the present. In Arun Joshi's novel the exact time contexts of colonial, post-colonial periods fail to retain their identity as distinct experiences because the vulnerability for power politics is projected as a perennial reality. Hence Joshi makes one of his character in *The City* describe human history as a "cyclic repetition of periodic power gain and disintegration, an endless repetition". (149) The novel *Anthills of Savannah* by Achebe does make a distinct reference to the specific time period of Nigerian history and for the same reason provides a discrete topical experience. Against the pessimism of Joshi who conveys existential angst as to the incapacity of the humanity to enact justice or fairness, Achebe vacillates between hope and disappointment in this matter. Achebe's hope is encoded in his faith as to the insufficiency of the elites alone to build a politically stable Nigeria. Or in other words he challenges and tries to subvert the primacy of elites alone for nation building. Instead he urges for a new kind of nation-building that avoids social exclusivity, extending opportunity to all communities in nationalist representation. Both the novels however enact the difficulty of building amicable relationship between people repressing differences, though the achievement of the same has many advantages. Rationalising of injustices of inequalities saves a nation from suffering the collapse of the democratic ideals and also help avoid occurrences of marginalization of whatsoever kind in the free nation status. Thus a perfect egalitarian life for humanity repudiating chauvinism and exclusivity of any kind is purported as a distant dream wish difficult to live in reality by both the authors.

The novel *Anthills of Savannah* is set in the fictional country of Kagan representing Nigeria, the novel *The City and the River* is set in an imaginary anonymous 'City', and is representative of any city state. But the greater temptation to identify the 'City' with India is felt because of the names chosen for certain characters; Pathanjali, Parashara, Dharmaveera etc, reminiscent of the spiritual heritage of India. Both the novels conceive of an imaginary military government, its elite cabinet and its oppressive, chauvinistic mode of functioning effectively. The broad outline of the story of *Anthills of Savannah* is as follows – 'His Excellency' of Kagan, wishing to establish himself as the President for life invokes referendum but on failing to get the support of the people of the province of Abazon

becomes too vicious towards them and perpetrates violence in league with his cabinet colleagues until the daring few challenge him. In Joshi's novel *The Grand Master of 'the City'* desiring to be declared as the king invokes support from the people of the City but on being refused support by a community called 'Boatmen or the Mud people' invokes violence and mayhem on them, destroying all opposing forces enroute. Both the leaders' aspiration is symbolic of desire for absolute power without any intermittent risks or threats of ever losing power. The atrocities they perpetrate are a fine paradigm of the abuse of executive power and authority. They scheme and try to impress the dissenters to accept the authority and on failure of which wreck havoc on them through cunning power machinations. Both take recourse to two kinds of malpractices; to gain and retain power and to eliminate dissension illegally. Both the books elaborately describe the reign of terror unleashed by the leaders in their respective nation states. The Grand Master through the 'Rallies Master' popularise himself as the 'humble servant of the people' (25) anointed by God to become the King. He uses the Palace Astrologer to project himself as the most prospective future king. (It's a clear case of misusing people's faith in astrology.) In the name of disciplining the people many arrests of important people are made on fake charges. All good forces namely the honest police officer Dharmavir, the Astronomy Professor, his student Master Bhooma or Bhumiputra, the Head Boatman and the good old man Panthanjali are all murdered one way or the other, by the secret machinations of the Grand Master. (He cautiously kept confidential his role in the mayhem.) The attack on the 'Rose Garden' that is symbolic of an ideal city (a utopia like condition) in the novel marks the climax of destruction. Similarly in *Anthills of Savannah*, 'His Excellency', Sam uses various tactics to preserve his power and to fulfill his desire. But these tactics ultimately proves self-destructive but not before enough havoc is caused and wastage of good forces is precipitated. He resorts to destroying his own friends Ikem Osodi and Chris Oriko. The strategy first is to charge them of sedition against nation to justify their imprisonment and then in confidentiality kill them. Further through a strategically imposed drought, the people of Abazon are revenged. Both the novels prove the intelligence of the intellectuals to frame ideologies that efficiently disguise personal profits. The three beatitudes conceived by the Grand Master in the name of the welfare of the state is an instance of the kind. The beatitudes are as follows; declaration of the public property as the collective property: framing of the law of compassionate righteousness to punish the erring citizens: the declaration of the "Era of Ultimate Greatness". To achieve the same the executive powers are permitted to discipline the erring people by extreme means of abusing the rights of the citizen. Then there is the condition that people either have to vow allegiance to the three beatitudes or face charges of treason against nation and to accept either of the way only meant loss. Similarity is also seen in the nature of the contenders thought of by both the

novelists; it is always the elite versus the underprivileged. The elites include the empowered; the rich, the educated and the well informed and the dispossessed includes the inclusive community of the poor, the women and the labour class. In Joshi's novel, a symbolically conceived community named as 'The Boatmen or the Mud people' (the name indeed signifies subordination) represent the dispossessed and the community of 'the Brick-People' represent the middle or upper middle class. But Achebe's oppressed classes are more of real life situations; authentic categories of the poor, the women and the labour class. Due to the chauvinistic tendencies of the elites and their exclusionary practises the fortune of evolving an egalitarian society is forever denied to the free nations. The exclusionary ways of the elites is condemned as the real causative of unfair society. Both the writers propound the idea that unless the elite shed their elitism and work commingled with the masses, all struggles of justice end in failure.

Further similarities are seen in the modes of resistance perceived against the erring Heads of the government. Both the writers recognise greater efficiency in woman to unite and gather force to struggle against injustices. If Achebe accords essential role to Beatrice in *Anthills* to express resistance, Joshi portrays the 'The Head Boatman' (an woman) as the capable combatant. She is the one who guides the whole community of the mud people to show allegiance only to the river (symbolic of life and nature) and not to any other human authority. She also instils strength in her people to resist the three beatitudes of the Grand Master and to remain steadfast in their decision to oppose the ways of the corrupt ruler. Both Achebe and Joshi believe in the immense capacity of the ordinary masses to rebel when extremes of atrocities are reached. It's the ordinary people of Abazon who defeat the referendum for absolute power by Major Sam and not elites like Chris or Ikem. Only later Chris or Ikem pick up the challenge when they personally bear the brunt of Sam's atrocities. In Joshi's novel while the brick people remain indifferent and passive, the gesture of rebellion begins from the mud people. The mud people though are ignorant and ill-equipped unlike the elite yet their number is their strength. Sensing this the Grand Master imposes population control on them and tries to subjugate them with the help of scientific gadgets. The Police Commissioner of the City says "The poorer the city, the more guns its government needs." (51) Ikem Osodi, the poet combatant in *Anthills* is shown as enlightening the ordinary people better through his stories of folk wisdom than through his aggressive editorials and Chris Oriko only on resigning as the minister, get the help of the taxi driver and students to carry on his struggle against the 'His Excellency'. In Joshi's novel also we have the enlightened Police Commissioner by name Dharmavir who resigns and joins the mud people to counter the Grand Master. Thus to both Achebe and Joshi discarding elitism is one of the essential step of any action plan to curb injustices against the oppressed because that way one does better empathise and don't merely sympathise

with the sufferers. If Achebe stresses the vitality of the people of Abazon in all their traditionality, Joshi identifies mud people living in close proximity with the river as full of vitality and strength to oppose coercive forces. Political cynicism pervading both the novels is so intense that one does doubt if Joshi and Achebe have lost complete hope in the ideal of a successful sovereign liberal democratic nation. The wastage of good forces when compared with the successes of the corrupt powers generates a kind of existential angst. The 'coup' in Achebe's novel and reference to the 'cycle of disintegration' in Joshi's novel signify repetition of power struggles. One starts doubting of ever building a harmonious relationship between people stifling differences. The wish fulfilment to build a nation where all voices count and not that of the privileged alone thus is thwarted.

The authorial ideology however embodies well thought of solution imaginatively for the ills discussed in the novels. With Achebe hope of good times is always there and the need is to revise the power base, opening its door to traditionally excluded groups and attuning of leadership capacities. As the mouth piece of Achebe, Ikem Osodi, the poet journalist Chris realises the importance of establishing vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed and Chris Oriko carries on Ikem's idea after his death with some success. But all those capable of instilling change die in the midway suggesting the difficulty of easy success. Thus the novel vacillates between fresh hope and disillusionment. Ikem is murdered, Chris exiled and killed but Beatrice picks up the challenge and continues the struggle. The importance of continuing the struggle is suggested in the name given for Ikem and Elewa's daughter- 'Amaechina', which means 'may-the-path-never-close'.(222) Beatrice though an elite, being a woman shoulder subordinate identity due for women in a patriarchal set up. Imbued with enlightened consciousness she shreds of her elitism and easily merges with the community of African woman and the other subalterns. Her action signifies the importance of inclusivity principle needed for the affirmative change. The same is enacted in the event of the naming ceremony in which people from all walks of life and of all classes participate, metaphorically upholding the value of "populist all inclusiveness". (John,133) Thus amidst all the prevailing anomalous conditions the idea of a sensible fair nation is not rejected out rightly by Achebe. The novel *The City and the River* too purports an interesting authorial ideology though is imbued with philosophical overtones. The Grand Master's sin reaches its pinnacle when he becomes a king by the unanimous selection of the Council of Ministers of his cabinet least caring for the people's referendum. The Grand Master in his fulfilment of his greed for power exceeds Major Sam's evil capacities. When all human efforts to curtail the Grand Master fail, his execution as a monarch is affected successfully not by any human agent but by the mediation of nature. When humans fail to control the abuses of fellow human beings, the city has its natural nemesis or retribution in the form of flood. The whole city and its inhabitants are washed

away (except one), by the raising flood of the turbulent river signifying divine retribution. At the same time the 'Hermit of the mountain', also called as 'The Great Yogeshwar' and the 'Nameless One' discuss the 'circular or cyclic movements of history'.(21) The Great Yogeshwar preaches on the continuity of life and changing of the old order giving place to new. The sacred enlightened visionary tells the 'Nameless One' (the one and only who survives the great flood) about the repetition of the history of mankind in the following words,

"On the ruins of the city, as always happens, a new city has arisen. In the city of the future as well, the character types remain unchanged. The men have other names but the forces they embody remain unchanged." (18)

But he also has a sure means to stop this endless repetition; the periodic disintegration. The Great Yogeshwar declares-'We need "purity" and to attain purity we have to shed off egoism, selfishness, stupidity and sacrifice.'(13) Achebe also, though not as assuredly as Joshi yet seems to believe in circular or cyclic movements of history. The clue to the same is given in the fact that the novel *Anthills* begins with a coup and ends with another coup. The sad reality is that every regime, military or civilian comes with its own oppressive mechanism and the people continue to suffer. If Achebe perceive the malaise of the society in the indiscipline and rampant selfishness of its leaders and the resultant national condition of lawlessness, Joshi believes in the inherent incapacity of the humanity to live ideal of any kind practically unless they show capacity for sacrifice. Both the writers portend their vision of a better future in figurative language; symbolic naming ceremony in *Anthills* and the natural nemesis of flood in the novel *The City*. Beatrice and The Great Yogeshwar have the answer but to live it verbatim one needs to transcend the greed for power, which indeed both the novel doubts authentically. Thus both Achebe and Arun Joshi are great artists in that they strive to go beyond the telling of a good and captivating story and endeavour to communicate something more significant and valuable that makes us reflect on our own lives, on the lives of our nation and on the history of human kind itself.

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