



Visualizing the “Shadow” and the “Ghost”: Re-evaluating J.M Coetzee’s *Foe* through the lens of Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism

Shibangi Chakraborty

Independent Researcher, West Bengal, India

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Abstract— The paper is mainly based on the study of colonial and psychological oppression, which can make someone totally devoid of his/her identity, thought, history, speech, desires and how these aspects are represented vaguely or rather ambivalently through different characters of the novel. It wants to speculate the boundaries between the past and present, the mental anxiety, the sense of awe and identity crisis of a black slave. This also marks a showcase of reversal of role as colonizer which is represented by two of the characters in the novel, a woman and a white man who is devoid of his own identity. The novel is connected with four of the characters mainly. The present study wants to get a look on those characters’ psychology as well as it gives a conception of how Postcolonialism is deeply rooted in psychological aspects.



Keywords— Colonial, History, Identity, Postcolonialism, Psychological.

I. INTRODUCTION

Slavery, submission and the brutality of the white force are discussed whenever we talk about Africans history. Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* even discusses the fact that Africans are the most savage and dark races in the world (Conrad, 1899). Though the Africans were majority, they faced a difficult time against the British colonial invasion. They submitted to the colonial hunger and accepted the drudgery of slavery and colonialism. The fact, that they accepted their fate, is not a weakness in their strength, but it was more psychological. The racial inequality that pervaded on that contemporary time of invasion, made a breach into the ideal concept of identity of the coloured people. The downtrodden feeling and ulterior motives of the white colonial rulers, broke their spirit and made them isolated in their own minds. The colonization and its impact not only shattered the existence of the natives but the trauma, anxiety, emptiness, impact of forceful rootlessness, alienation are clearly evident in the literature of the Colonial and Postcolonial time, which connects it to Psychoanalysis. The ill practices on the basis of caste, race, culture, have always threatened the system of

the humanity. Homi K. Bhabha, gave us the idea of mimicry and the reversal of roles which brings the cultural anxiety and alienation in his book *Location of Culture* (Bhabha, 2004). The Natives, specially the African Black skinned people have always been marginalized. They have seen a long period of discrimination by the White European people. The voices of the Aborigines are deliberately oppressed by the colonial authority- which leads to their psychological alienation from mainstream society and literature. But Literature stood up for the indigenous or aboriginal community when they tried to describe the pain, mental and physical torture of the colonizers. They spoke for their rights, their long fights, violence, bloodshed, cultural abolishment by the White Colonial rulers. They fought for their identity and individual self where they were regarded as cannibals, slaves, ghostly people etc. Not only the ‘black’ aborigines but some white skinned writers also described the sufferings of the natives in their writings with their own opinions. The African- American writer J.M Coetzee has a long run of history in writings about them. He writes about a smooth relationship between the “colonizer” and “colonized” people. The Ambiguity in relationships,

identity and human psychology, prevails in most of his novels and '*Foe*' is not an exceptional. This article specially tries to impose some problems and tends to find a solution to those problems. The first problem that it possesses is regarding the "ghostly" presence of the characters. They tend to find themselves into that "ghostly" figure. It discusses why the figure of "ghost" has been mentioned numerous time in the novel and how it can be called an ambiguous entity with various interpretations. The next figure of "shadow" is quite similar with the "ghost". But it tends to verify the psychological and physiological significance of the "shadow" all the more.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Psychoanalysis is connected with the human psyche which reflects the human behaviour, the alacrity of the human brain. Psychoanalysis is a set of theories or ideas that had been propounded by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as-"A therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association" (Oxford, 1243). Freud found out the structure of Human Psyche in 1920 and they are represented as "Conscious", "Unconscious" and "Subconscious" mind (Freud, 1923-26). The fragmented consciousness of our mind beget the three fragmented desires i.e. the Id, Ego and the Superego. Celine Surprenant writes- "Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. However all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature ...is fundamentally entwined with psyche" (Waugh, 2006, P 201). Since the origin of the Psychoanalysis and the study of human psyche by Sigmund Freud, a great deal of literature came with different views on science of human psychology, the cultural affiliation, social stigma, devices of finding time shift between human mind and many other things. It involves an evaluation of critical and artistic literature. As Waugh said, "The development of psychoanalytic approaches to literature proceeds from the shift of emphasis from "content" to the fabric of artistic and literary works" (Waugh, 2003). The term "Postcolonialism", (without hyphenated) symbolizes that we are still living by having the "Postcolonial hangover". But the term "Post-colonialism" (with hyphen) means that there is no connection between the pre-colonial past and the post colonial present. It is a huge field of study where almost all the world comes within it because the White Europeans have reigned in almost half of the world. Edward Said in his

book *Orientalism* has alluded that the West dominated in the East by capturing them by not only applying their military force but also by moulding their culture (Said, 1979). However it projects that Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism is wholly connected with each other.

III. ANALYSIS

The word "ghost" has been used several times in the novel *Foe*. But each word carries different meaning in different contexts. The very word "ghost" has been presented as an ambiguous figure without any statutory meaning. They are intriguing. Sometimes they are meaningful in the context of life and death boundaries, sometimes they come as the embodiment of a past which is long repressed to be forgotten. Several other times it is associated as a postcolonial term presented as an unsubstantial figure. The "ghost" is used as a "mark of lack" (Waugh, P 345) or the sense of loss which is associated with memory. First of all, we connect the novel *Foe* with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, this can be summarized as the iteration of the novel written by Defoe, which carries a mark of memory. The last part of the novel, it is mentioned "Daniel Defoe, Author, are the words, white on blue, and then more writing too small to read" (Coetzee, 1986, P. 155). It can be interpreted that Daniel Defoe has been presented as a "ghost" to Mr. J.M Coetzee. Then again, we come across with the word "ghost" repeatedly in a paragraph in the novel which is clearly evident in its impact for presenting it as a memory- "I say myself that this child, who calls herself by my name, is a ghost, a substantial ghost" (Coetzee, 1986, P 132). Susan is irritated and disturbed by the girl who calls herself as the daughter of Susan. She complains to Mr. Foe that the daughter has been made to be called by her name and she refuses to be her mother. She is nothing but a 'substance' who brings other memories of Susan- "brings other ghosts in a tow" (Coetzee, 1986, P 132). Here the "ghost" can be called the mark of her past. In Henrik Ibsen's play *Ghost*, Mrs. Alving was also suffering with the memories of Mr. Alving and her son, Oswald also was seen to bring back the memories of his father- "I am anxious and fearful because of the ghosts that haunt me, that I can't get rid of" (Ibsen, 2015, P 40). Susan is seen accusing Mr. Foe of summoning her life's past or memories which seem to chase her continuously because Mr. Foe has pinched her "wound", her woe of losing her daughter- "I tell myself, and is sent by you to console me; but, lacking skill in summoning ghosts (Coetzee, 1986, P 132). Also Mrs. Barfield's story, which she comes across in the library of Mr. Foe and has been written by him, is represented as a "ghost" or 'memory'. But apparitions can be painful at times. People may conclude that memories cannot touch us or we cannot

feel it. But Susan finishes – “Thus I conclude you are aware that ghosts can converse with us, and embrace and kiss us too” (Coetzee, 1986, P 134). According to Birgit Neumann-Memories are connected with the presence of the past in the present and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfil for the constitution of identity (Neumann, 2010). Memories and dreams are interconnected with each other. If the example of the novel is taken, the first meeting between Susan and Mr. Foe has a vague conversation about sleep and dreams. They have summoned their dreams in different ways. Susan is asked by Foe- “And do you meet with Phantoms in your sleep? (Coetzee, 1986, P 137) Here probably by the word “phantoms” he wants to mean her dark and deep desires which according to Freud find a road to disclose themselves in the dream state of a human body (Freud, 1913). The darker sides of human are generally confined within the Id, but it is the dream which makes the thoughts free. Susan’ reply is a mark where she speaks about her memories that come in her dreams- “They are memories, memories of my waking hours, broken and mingled (Coetzee, 1986, P 138). These memories are probably her long lost wishes which are fulfilled through her dreams. The suggestion of “ghost” is also symbolical because it points out the boundary between the living and the dead. As Mr. Foe has said- “There he met the souls of the dead. One of the souls was weeping. “Don’t suppose mortal”, said this soul, addressing him, “that because I am not substantial” (Coetzee, 1986, P 136). “Ghost” is the symbol of an unsubstantial body. An apparition which cannot be seen or felt, whose very identity is a mystery. Friday and Susan’s identity in the novel is somewhat very obscure and inglorious. Friday as a black slave has already lost his own existence. Susan, as a female body is also treated as a mere object, without identity. When she and Friday take shelter in Mr. Foe’s home, she exclaims, “When you return, we will vanish like ghosts, without complaint” (Coetzee, 1986, P 64). If the identity of Mr. Foe is the house, then they are mere ghosts, who live without any complaint and noise. Again she remarks, “We hear no word from you, and the town folk pay us no more heed than if we were ghosts” (Coetzee, 1986, P 87). Here they do not exist even to the people around them, their neighbourhood. Susan questions her ontological self again and again, “I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too?” (Coetzee, 1986, P 133) Here the boundary between reality and imagination goes blurred and not to be understood so easily. Friday’s silence is what makes him more insignificant creature- “We should be as quiet as ghosts” (Coetzee, 1986, P 59). Coetzee had made him a creature who cannot even speak for his rights, “He has lost his tongue, there is no language in which he can speak, not even in his own” (Coetzee, 1986, P 108). When Crusoe was uprooted from

his island, he lost all his strength and died out of woe. In the island he was the king, where there was none to command him and make him under rule. But when he was taken, “Crusoe lay pale as a ghost” (Coetzee, 1986, P 38) where he knew his fall is inevitable. This could be marked as a native resistance in post-apartheid era where the roles got reversed for a “Colonizer” and a “Colonized”, and gave birth to a complex and ambivalent situation. As in *Disgrace*, Lucy, the white girl has been raped by two black men, but she cannot resist and protest against that (Coetzee, 1999). Susan called him “Ghost” for she regards him as her memory, where she resides, where her identity goes, “A ghost beside the true body of Crusoe” (Coetzee, 1986, P 51). There is always a presence of flicker of light where the shadow appears. But the hope not always gets the opportunity of flourishing for everyone. Some people are born in darkness, raised in darkness and spends their life like a silhouetted figure- without noticing and without care. Friday, in the novel *Foe* can be seen as a ‘shadowy’ figure, whose very identity is questioned again and again in the novel. As an African slave, he has a story of inhuman suffrage. His tongue has been taken off, he has been uprooted at first from his motherland and then from the island of Crusoe, which was like his second home. These cause an anxiety and the colonization recreated his identity when he has been taken away from his mother. In the very first page of the novel Susan, as a castaway reaches the shore of Crusoe’ island, wakes up and mentions- “A dark shadow fell upon me” (Coetzee, 1986, P 1). She does not notice Friday as a human figure at first, but gives a figure of “dark shadow”. Here the colonial perspective of a colonizer has been made very clear, where the blacks are devoid of their identity. Susan again and again proves herself as a white mistress while she says- “Hitherto I had found Friday a shadowy creature and paid him little more attention than I would have given any horse-slave in Brazil” (Coetzee, 1986, P 24). The existence of Friday to her is at the verge of extinction, where she pays no heed. Although she has lost everything but she still thinks herself superior than him and it’ like a defamation to her at the same level to be with Friday- “Ah Friday! ...shipwreck is a great leveller, and so is destitution but we are not level enough yet” (Coetzee, 1986, P 70). Friday is treated while living with Susan, as her inseparable companion. He follows Susan like her shadow after moving to England, because England is not his motherland where he could find his real name- “Friday has grown to be my shadow. Do our shadows love us, for all that they are never parted from us?”(Coetzee, 1986, P 115) Here the theory of Bhabha’ ambivalence can be well applied where a colonizer i.e. Susan finds a tries to find a human relation with Friday, although with negligence (Bhabha 2004). As for Friday, staying for a long time with Crusoe and Susan, he somehow

wants to find his identity in their existence or the way of living. As Bhabha points- "Mimicry is thus the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which appropriates the other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha, 2004). It could be a deep delved desire of Friday to be recognized as his own. Carl Jung is famously known for presenting the shadow as the part of our unconscious mind while Connie Zweig mentions in an interview in the proportion of Jung "...there are so many topics that were in the cultural shadow which are now out in the light...For example, domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, alcoholism in epidemic proportions...These issues were in the collective shadow, they were taboo, forbidden topics, areas we didn't want to look at. In terms of individuals, anything that is unacceptable to us, anything that's hidden or denied — what we want to hide from, what we don't want to know about ourselves — that's the shadow" (Zweig, 2017). Now Coetzee has described Friday in such a subtle manner that his dark desires are to be observed through various depictions and moods in the novel. "Shadow" works as an alter ego for Friday, where his deep desires for lust, barbarism, self realizing made a stay. Susan says, "Friday's desires are not dark to me. He desires to be liberated, as I do" (Coetzee, 1986, P 148) Friday' desire to get freedom from the tyrant hands of the colonizers is not new for colonized. He has accepted the bondage of colonizer because he had prepared his mind for the labour and exploitation he has to face. In the "Introduction: Situating the Postcolonial" it is mentioned- "Attitudes such as Hegel' were used to justify colonization...At the same time, Africans and other colonial people were seen as mentally and physically adapted only for menial labour or routine clerical positions" (Hegel, 2007). But even the animals in the cage have the desire for freedom. As Susan says, "There is an urging that we feel, all of us, in our hearts to be free" (Coetzee, 1986, P 149). Friday' dance wearing the robes of Mr. Foe is significant because this is a clear picture of presenting his alter ego- "In the morning he dances in the kitchen, where the windows face East" (Coetzee, 1986, P 92). The sunrise gives birth to his shadow in the opposite direction, which could mean that he purifies his soul by facing the Sun. These all could mean that his unconscious mind provokes him to generate intentions of getting freedom. The dance could be seen as his native resistance where he refuses to listen to the colonizers. The dance by wearing the robes could also mean his hunger of an identity like the colonizers. He tries to mimic Crusoe, his master. This suggestion could also suggest that by dancing he wants to create a connection with the island because in England he feels alienated, chilled. The trauma of leaving his home could also create a double consciousness. As Tyson said, "Double consciousness often produced an

unstable sense of self, which has heightened by the forced migration colonialism frequently caused" (Tyson, 2006, P 420). Repressed sexual desire can also create a kind of distortion in his mind as it has mentioned before. As Susan said, "Surely desires kept banked for many years must have flamed up within you" (Coetzee, 1986, P 86). But as she has expected that the sexual urge would compel Friday to make a move towards Susan, has not happened. Thus, the figure of "shadow" can be interpreted in the context of identity, self-realization, suppression, a substance, the lower esteem, which has made it' way in the lives of Friday as well as Susan.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study yields some major problems of society and individuals, which has been mainly reflected by Friday and Susan. Their main problems that have been found are both psychological and social. They face a great difficulty in adapting themselves to a new place. Not only Susan and Friday but Crusoe also, who dies of agony only in the vision of leaving his self-made abode. The cause of their difficulty in living to a new place is mainly derived from the fear of being lost in the stream as they have been uprooted from their native place. Another problem that is mainly focused in this study, is that they constantly being referred to as the unsubstantial bodies, without any entities. They are failed to find their identities, mentally and physically. Susan remains stable in her world of memories of her past, which haunt her unscrupulously. As a female, the natural problem she faces is being unnoticed and disregarded. Friday' identity crisis is due to his race, who is colonized by the "Whites" but his urge to escape is prominent. *Foe* is naturally categorized as a postcolonial novel, where numerous problems regarding colonial issues can be found. In concluding it can definitely be said that the society needs serious development in their stereotypical mindset. Discrimination someone in the basis of caste, creed, race or gender should be restricted. The study needs to seek those refinements from the society. By hatching Friday' mental pain and Susan' harassments for being a woman can well define the stress and hardships of other people who are being maltreated. There are many other Fridays and Susans who also have their rights to live according to their own.

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