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**Colonial Remnants: A Study of Baldwin's *What the Body
Remembers***

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Abstract: *The different diasporic groups have recognized the Neo-colonial tendencies of the imperialist nations as they were directly exposed to their systemic oppression. Since imperialism initially operates through economic negotiations with its subjects, globalization feeds its spread as it basically frees trade across nations. Historically, imperialism used similar schemes to penetrate several economies and then turned towards a socio-political ascendancy upon the colonized State. Shauna Singh Baldwin scintillated a massive readership through the popularization of her first novel, What the Body Remembers. Gender as a phenomenon appears to be in a constant state of negotiation with body, language as well as with embodiment. Throughout the extensive course of history, gendered constructions have been depicted amidst literature against certain cultural constructions. As every literary text is produced out of crucial cultural conditions, the notion stands purely true in the case of gender studies. The binary which runs between the masculine and the feminine and its various nuances hereby contribute in problematizing the literary field. Various texts lay out similar concerns of depicting the internalization of certain codes. The very term "code" becomes a key issue whilst engaging with gender studies as it is imperative in any study of gender. The idea of masculinity and femininity is more or less a construction and replication of certain codes of behavior. Such codes can be recognized in conduct, dressing, language, embodiment etc. Essentially, they are a critical feature of a relatively defined coded system. The codes along with a few other latent features, combine together in order to problematize the male-female essentialist ideologies besides concealing their constructed quality. Thus, it becomes critical to identify the gendered identities as not natural givens but a notion which is artificially constructed. Only, it is so endlessly ritualized, internalized and replicated, that after a certain period their constructed quality precedes any interrogation. In other words, their construction is consumed inarguably. However, upon placing it under scrutinization, an entire series of questions arise to surface. For instance, one begins to think to what extent is gender biologically determined and to what extent it is culturally determined. This in turn, leads one onto contemplating if there is a cultural component to gender or is it entirely a cultural construction or a balancing point between the two. The present paper attempts to examine such differences from a trans-nationalist perspective where these identities become more complex as the racial, sexual and class identities also conflate with gendered antithesis along the lines of globalization and imperialism.*

Keywords: Globalization, imperialism, colonial legacies, gender, diaspora.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Capitalism is predominantly a money-using system where a large part of wealth is held either in the form of money or as money-denominated assets, namely financial assets. For the system to work, it is essential that the value of money should not keep declining against commodities; otherwise people would move away from holding money, and it would cease to be not just a form of wealth, but even a medium of circulation. Hence, capitalism seeks to ensure the stability of the value of money in a number of ways. One is the maintenance of a vast reserve army of labour, not just within the metropolis but also in the third world. This "distant" reserve army keeps down not only local money wages, and hence the prices of raw materials produced there, but also the money wages of workers in the metropolis, who are threatened with unemployment through capital

outflows to the third world, if they insist on higher wages. These reserve armies in both centre and periphery, however, are not enough. Even if there were no autonomous increase in raw material prices and money wages due to the existence of these reserve armies, certain scarce commodities would still experience a price rise as capital accumulation increases the demand for them. The threat this poses to the value of money has also to be warded off, which is done by restricting the demand for such commodities outside the core capitalist sector, through a squeeze on mass purchasing power by imposing an “income deflation”.

Historically, two typical instruments of such income deflation have been the siphoning off without any quid pro quo of the surplus produced in the periphery (Indian anti-colonial economists called this the “drain of wealth”), along with the destruction of petty production there through imports from the capitalist metropolis (which the same writers labelled de-industrialization)—a process that created the “distant” reserve army in the first place. This entire arrangement, encompassing the world outside of capitalism proper, constitutes “imperialism.” It does not end with colonialism; on the contrary, its importance increases with financialization when stability of the value of money becomes a matter of even greater overriding concern.

Imperialism as an arrangement nonetheless has remained largely invisible to the discipline of economics, even to its best practitioners and even in the colonial period. John Maynard Keynes, in his classic work *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, talked about the “economic Eldorado” that pre-war Europe represented, but failed to mention that this Eldorado rested upon an elaborate framework of imperialism. Europe’s accessing of food from the “new world,” an important aspect of this Eldorado, would not have been possible if this food had not been paid for, through an intricate arrangement, by Britain’s appropriation *gratis* of a part of the surplus of its colonies and semi-colonies (drain of wealth), and by its export of manufactured goods to its colonies and semi-colonies at the expense of their local producers. Imperialism, however, is not just some phenomenon limited to history. The present paper attempts to underline global capitalism in all its epochs, including the current era of globalization along with the contribution of Diaspora in foregrounding an anti-racist critique against the forces of colonialism.

2. Research value:

The different diasporic groups have recognized the Neo-colonial tendencies of the imperialist nations as they were directly exposed to their systemic oppression. Since imperialism initially operates through economic negotiations with its subjects, globalization feeds its spread as it basically frees trade across nations. Historically, imperialism used similar schemes to penetrate several economies and then turned towards a socio-political ascendancy upon the colonized State.

3. Textual Resources :

Shauna Singh Baldwin scintillated a massive readership through the popularization of her first novel, *What the Body Remembers*. Since its publication in 1999, it has been translated into fourteen different languages which speaks for its thematic appeal. The text acquired international recognition after receiving the 2000 Commonwealth Writer’s prize for the Canada-Caribbean region besides being long-listed for the prestigious Orange Prize in fiction. It has characterized several nuanced characters including Sardarji’s, which reflected the sheer force of penetration of imperialist influence as it adulterated the very psyche of Indian men. Through him, Baldwin puts forth the character of an affluent England return engineer, an opulent “jagirdar” of Rawalpindi during pre-Partition India, unfortunately suffering the burden of a fractured and divided identity which keeps gnawing at his sanity. Since, he has been portrayed as an employee of an imperialist administration which ensures his influential standing, he rejects any contingency which threatens a change in bureaucracy. Sardarji favours the imperialist reign over the liberation of his country as an alteration in the administrative system forces an alteration upon his own economic position. Meanwhile, his character turns even more nuanced as the author reveals the presence of a split in his personality. The years he spent in London while he was pursuing his higher studies, he came in contact with the Western culture which turned him into an adulatory preacher of their culture. His character portrayed several ‘English’ characteristics both physical and psychological. His gestures and behaviours imitated those of the imperialists and their ideals. His very conscience yearned to mimic the British so much so that one day he might become one. Such a yearning and the Western influence worked hand in hand to generate an abstract element of his conscience which he refers to as Cunningham. The allusion traces its origin back to the achievements of Alexander Cunningham who was a popular British engineer during the mid-nineteenth century and Sardarji was influenced by his intellectual philosophies. The narrator defines Cunningham as Sardarji’s “own personal English-gentleman-inside” (Baldwin 132). Through the depiction of Cunningham, the author comments at the strong influence of the

Western culture and notions upon an already colonized mind. The cultural shock which he endured as an emigrant in an imperialist nation, created a fissure in his psyche which established as a perpetual breach within his intellect that continued to bother him even after he returned back home. The narrator mentions:

Cunningham still saddles Sardarji's mind, hoary phantom remnant of his years in England. And now Sardarji cannot remember how he thought before he learned to think with Cunningham. Cunningham grafted so long ago, does the watching now and argues less and less as long as Sardarji asks only the questions Cunningham approves of, walks and talks the way Cunningham has taught. (Baldwin 133)

Such an aberration renders Sardarji a constant slave to Cunningham, adulating his British masters. Cunningham drives his instinct and influences his decisions. Thus, the coercion of the imperialist drive, rendered Sardarji as a potential enslaved victim through their hegemonic cultural regimes. Therefore, his abysmal condition becomes exemplary in comprehending the geopolitics of cultural imperialism. Through such an illustration, the present global scenario driven by the forces of colonial legacies, the Neo-colonial regimes empowered by globalization, can be realized as the emigrants seeking settlement in the First-World still confront are still confronted with several capitalistic norms. Moreover, the fascination of the Third-World with the Western culture still results in its imitation as underlined by Homi Bhabha in his influential text, *Location of Culture*.

However, Sardarji's character brings out another critical trait which seeks analytical attention. Sardarji violated Satya's affection through engaging in bigamy and afterwards terrorized Roop into giving up her child so that he could "satisfy" Satya. The sheer force of the portrayal of the dominance of his 'toxic masculinity' engulfed Roop and rendered her defenceless. However, the sharp contrast amidst his conduct towards Roop before the birth of their child and afterwards has been laced with sanctimony. The moment he learnt about the girl child, he turned acrimonious. His apathy and indifference at the arrival of a daughter recount for the loathing which was associated with the birth of a girl child during the period. In her essay, "Sexuality and Sexual Politics", Evelyne Accad mentions:

The meaning and importance given to a military weapon and to the sexual weapon are equal. Man uses his penis in the same way he uses his gun: to conquer, control, and possess. The whole macho society must be unveiled and condemned because in the present system one tries to obtain material goods and territory, not in order to enjoy them, not out of need, but only to enlarge one's domain and authority. Similarly, sexual relations are not built on pleasure, tenderness, or love, but on reproduction, the preservation of girls' virginity (so-called "honour" of the family), the confinement and control of women for the increase in male prestige, and the overestimation of the penis. (Accad 246)

4. CONCLUSION:

Therefore, Sardarji's character has been explicitly depicted an absolute adherent of a similar approach exemplifying toxic masculinity. His actions held the ruthlessness of absolutist dominance which symbolized the totalitarian patriarchal strategies implemented upon Indian women during the British reign. On one hand, Cunningham pricked at his conscience to act as a British gentleman and on the other, his gender provided him with an entirely separate sense of supremacy over the "second sex". Baldwin has artfully crafted such a nuanced and round character so that the dominance of the imperialists during the colonial history and the relative capitalist tendencies of the colonial legacies could be realized. The novel becomes relevant to comprehend that the colonial encounter not only conquered geopolitics through 'divide and rule' policy, but also drove the colonial psyche by dividing their psychology into two as depicted by Shauna Singh Baldwin through Sardarji's character. The novel portrayed the contemporary condition of several Third-World countries which still have been struggling with the ordeals of the 'colonial hangover' as globalization somewhere threatens the successive strategies of colonial legacies which remain hidden beneath the surface to crawl their way back in.

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