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A STUDY OF HOMI K. BHABHA'S 'MIMICRY' IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S NERVOUS CONDITIONS

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Abstract

The question of existence becomes the predominant issue in the major colonial and postcolonial aspects of study. 'Identity crisis' is the ultimate core problem of all postcolonial issues irrespective of the colonial subjects and the ways of subjugation. The colonial subjects become the victims of subjugation and marginalization. In contrast to Rene Descartes' philosophical ideology "I think, therefore I am", colonialism eradicates the self of human beings, by turning them into mere subjects, questioning the radical thinking of humans, which results in making them confused subjects. While discussing the eradicated self of human beings, there is always a stereotypical way of representing something as being ideal. But in actuality, there is a little possibility of having an exact 'Representation' as an ideal. The 'Beings' do exist in the false consciousness of representing the 'Misrepresentations'. The study focuses much on the colonised individuals rather than on the colonial countries, which in turn tries to highlight the concept of 'blurred caricatures' of mimicry, with reference to Tsitisi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions*.

Keywords: Mimicry, Nervous conditions, Homi Bhabha, Dangarembga.

Postcolonialism started emerging during the 1980's, as a pro-active movement against any kind of injustice, depravity and distinction. Postcolonial literatures act as a cultural resistance to uphold the state of the colonized. Albeit postcolonial study generally covers the politics of colonialism and its aftermath effects, it can specifically be reduced to different aspects of study such as hybridity, diaspora, sub-altern, ambiguity, Orientalism, mimicry, etc., with its varied characteristic features. Homi.K.Bhabha's 'Mimicry' is one such term that throws light on much of the psyche of the colonized rather than the physical oppression. Literally, mimicry means the process of imitation. Bhabha's colonial mimicry specifies the imitation of the colonizers' behaviours, which

intends to copy the imperial power, hoping to access the same power. The whites become the ultimate destiny of all the racially distinguished people. The inferiority created among the Oppressed makes them feel different from their colonizers, and this results in mimicry.

Mimicry reflects the ambivalence between the colonizer and the colonized in colonial and postcolonial settings. It creates 'blurred images' of the colonized subjects as they get so confused because of their cultural encounter with a dominant foreign culture. The process of mimicking is a continuous process of transmission that will never end in the state of 'become'. As Bhabha says, the people who mimicre are "almost the same" as the colonizer "but not quite". The mimic-men will never be equal to the people who are mimicked. Mimics are not the subjects of English rather the subjects of 'Anglicized'. Benedict Anderson's words emphasize this: "to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English".

Mimicry can be used as a subversive tool against the imperial power. It may either be threatening or mockery or parody or contradictory or unintentionally subversive. For instance, the 'performative mimicry' is a kind of performance that exposes the artificiality of all symbolic expressions of power, in which mockery and parody prevail. Mimicry can also be subversive and empowering, as it threatens the imperial power by excelling in their concepts of justice, freedom and the rule of law. The awareness of the imperial system among the mimics make the colonized threatened. In turn, contradictory to the mimicry being discussed here, there is something called 'reverse mimicry' meaning 'going native'. In all the cases of mimicry, the self is questioned, irrespective of its perspectives. Adding to these varied aspects of mimicry, there is a mimicry with reference to 'been-to', to which this study is closely related. The concept of 'been-to' refers to the colonial subjects who have travelled to the west, and then returned 'home', seemingly completely transformed, and always offended by the natives.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is a novel set in the colony of Rhodesia, Zimbabwe. It is the first novel by the Zimbabwean writer and is also the first published novel in English by a black Zimbabwean woman. The partly autobiographical novel is set around a girl named Tambudzai, called as Tambu, who lives on an impoverished farm in Rhodesia, Zimbabwe in the late 1960's.

Tambu, the protagonist, greatly aspires for her own education inspite of her family and political background. As the result of her brother's death, she gets the opportunity of missionary schooling and of living with her western-educated uncle Babamukuru and his family. The entire family of Babamukuru is atleast partially western-educated. They have also spent a few years in England. Consequently, Tambu's cousins have spent their early years immersed within and influenced by the colonizer's culture. Babamukuru and his family members are considered as 'been-to's in the present study. Among the characters of the novel, Nyasha, Tambu's cousin and also her close friend, is the focus of this study, as she seems to be highly victimised by the 'Englishness'. It can even be said that Nyasha's exploration in this novel is much higher than the protagonist's.

Mainini, Tambu's mother, is a typical native woman who always has a strange feeling towards Babamukuru's family and their behaviours. She perceives them as aliens in their society and is deeply offended by them. She believes that Englishness kills the people who engage in mimicking it. She says, "It's the Englishness, it'll will kill them all if they aren't careful..."(207), as she worries about Tambu's life when she is promoted to the next level of her study at Sacred Heart Convent, fearing that it would end her daughter's life as it has already killed her son Nhamo. She even accuses Babamukuru's family for the death of her son, as they have taken him with them to study in the missionary school. She is not able to accept her son's skill of speaking in English, feeling offended that it has taken him away from her, creating the space between them. As per the offending nature of natives, even Tambu is criticizable. Though she is also a mimic, having the trace of 'been-to', she has the same strange and uncomfortable feeling towards her cousins when they return from England.

Nyasha, Tambu's cousin, is one of the four women Tambu loves. Nyasha's English upbringing makes her distant from the other characters in the novel. She herself feels the strangeness within her. As a victim of 'been-to' she has lost her identity. She once mentions to Tambu how she and her brother felt about returning to homestead after the stay at England: "We had forgotten what home was like. I mean really forgotten - what it looked like, what it smelt like, all the things to do and say and not to do and say. It was all strange and new" (79). Nyasha is aware of her confused state, where she even

has the opinion of not being taken to England by her parents, as they are stuck with hybrids for children. As native parents, though of western education, they find it difficult to accept Nyasha's English way of behaviour and thoughts. Babamukuru especially finds it difficult to understand his daughter. Both of them pick quarrels often. The relationship between Nyasha and Babamukuru is not smooth, as he dislikes the way she behaves with elders and with boys, the way she dresses and the kind of books she reads. But with Babamukuru and Maiguru it is different. Though they are western-educated, they are not completely away from their native culture. Englishness is reflected only in their education and career and not much in their behaviour. They continue to give importance to their family traditions. On the other hand, Nyasha is completely dissimilar from them in her perceptions of interpreting things. She has even adopted the habit of smoking to get away from all the hysteria in the house. Nyasha's intellect and wit make her different from others. Nyasha's friends dislike her as they think she considers herself as white and she is proud. They also dislike the way she dresses and her behaviour with boys.

Tambu is much close to Nyasha and Nyasha freely expresses herself only to Tambu. Tambu admires Nyasha for her intellect and radical thoughts, the same thoughts which make Nyasha appear odd and superior in the eyes of the natives. Nyasha feels comfortable in Tambu's companionship, as she considers it as a let-out for her from all the hysteria she has been feeling at home. Tambu plays an important role in bridging the gaps in the life of Nyasha. When Tambu goes to Sacred Heart Convent, Nyasha finds life miserable. She engages herself fully in reading and studying to distract herself, which slowly results in psychic disorder. She mentions in her letter to Tambu: "I cannot help thinking that what antagonises is the fact that I am me – hardly, I admit, the ideal daughter for a hallowed headmaster, a revered patriarch"(201). She becomes imbalanced at the end of the novel, accusing that Englishness has deprived everyone, herself, Chido and Tambu. She says to her father, "I don't hate you, Daddy, They want me to, but I won't, I am very tired" (205). Her distorted image results in her visit to the psychiatrist.

Though Chido, Nyasha's brother and Tambu are not as victimized as Nyasha, the novel has the traces of references with their mimicries. Chido, unlike Nyasha never feels

offended by his father. The presence of Chido is much less in the home. He studies in the Government Public school at Salisbury, reducing his stay at home. He even spends much of his vacation in his friends' house. The real victimization of Chido is revealed through Mainini's words, "That boy Chido can hardly speak a word of his own mother's tongue and, you'll see, his children will be worse. Running around with that white one, isn't he, the missionary's daughter? His children will disgrace us" (207). In Tambu, the protagonist and the narrator of the novel, the Englishness has the least effect. She admires the superiority of the Englishness in its way of education and sophisticated life. So she wants the English way of life with the sole purpose of acquiring the English style of education. Yet she cannot be called English, as her homestead always reminds her of her role as the daughter of her native parents. In spite of her admiration for her Englishness, she finds difficulty in adopting the English way of living, its food, dancing, etc. She expresses her strange feeling saying, "When the surroundings were new and unfamiliar, the awareness was painful and made me behave very strangely" (112). Though Tambu is clear about her ways, she starts doubting the result of Englishness as an effect of Nyasha's disorder and her mother's repeated warnings about the slippages of Englishness. But Tambu tries to get out of the doubts and she banishes it, continuing her study at the Sacred Heart Convent. But the novel's end states the possibility of the seeds of doubts, though banished at present, may grow at anytime in the future. This raises the scope for further studies in analysing Tambu as a full-fledged mimic in the upcoming novel of Tsitisi Dangarembga.

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