

## A STUDY OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE IN JOHN MASTERS'S NOVEL “NIGHTRUNNERS OF BENGAL”

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### ABSTRACT

American critic Stephen Greenblatt coined the term ‘New Historicism’. It is the reading of literary and non-literary texts in the same historical period. The writers can perceive the facts of the past and depicts these facts from their own concepts to create history. John Masters also wrote with historical perspectives. Knowledge is an implementation of power. Power and knowledge is a productive and constraining. This article examines the power and the knowledge of victors and victims in John Masters's novel Night runners of Bengal. It attempts to study the socio-cultural perspectives and dominant culture in the society.

**KEYWORDS:** *New Historicism, the Ideology of Victors and the Victims, the Power and the Knowledge, the Marginalized Voices, and Cultural Materialism.*

### INTRODUCTION

New historicism is a method of interpretation of literary and non-literary texts. The interpretation gives the study of society and culture. The term New Historicism was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982. New historicism called as companioned texts of history and literature. New historicist focuses the term power and knowledge in the historical interpretation of the text. The French philosopher Michael Foucault coined the term Power and Knowledge. According to Foucault, power is constructed on knowledge and made use of knowledge. Power reproduces knowledge by shaping it. Power created its own structure through knowledge. John Masters also shaped his novels according to historical perspective. He interpreted the power and knowledge of victors and victims in the text.

Lieutenant Colonel John Masters (1914-1933) was an English officer in the Indian army and a novelist. John Masters is known for his historical novels set in India. His works are associated with British Empire in India. John Master's family had a long tradition of service in Indian army. John Masters subsequently worked in Iraq, Syria and Persia with the battalion. He wrote eight historical novels and two autobiographical novels. He wrote his real experiences in the army.

In this novel *Night Runners of Bengal* (1951)- The protagonist of the novel captain Rodney Savage is an officer in a Bengal native infantry Regiment. Captain Rodney had bitter experiences about the British rudeness and hauteur. In this novel John Masters took up the ‘terror’ and tragedy of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. It was all about “The Sepoy Rebellion”. John Masters focuses the Socio-Cultural perspectives in this novel. He also represents the historical events in mythical, stereotypical and racist fashion.

Rodney Savage was the captain of the 13<sup>th</sup> rifles Bengal, native infantry. Rodney married Joanna. They lived in Bhowani. The native sepoy were forced to follow certain rules and regulations. But the native sepoy never gave up their culture and customs. Hence they were against the ruler of the British East Indian Company. It led both British and Indian people into strong violence. It led to Indian mutiny in which most of the British and native people were killed. Rodney's wife also was killed. Savage escaped with his son and Caroline Langford, a visitor from England to India. Eventually the nativesepoy were forced to give up their violence. The British East India Company made the native people become marginalized class.

The research paper is all about the study of power and knowledge in John Masters's novel *Nightrunners of Bengal*. It attempts to study the dominant socio-cultural perspectives and dominant culture in the society. This article examines the power and the knowledge of victors and victims.

New historicism and cultural materialism concerned with the subjects that have been marginalized by dominant culture, class and caste. The marginalized voices have generally been silenced by the dominant ideology, example women or gay men. According to Antonio Gramsci hegemony is the pre dominance of one social class over another by means of subtle coercion. The dominant culture maintains this position through struggle with the groups, and it subordinated and must work constantly to keep them subordinate.

The power is a central assumption to new historicist. Power is a fundamental human intention for human actions and power is a strong force productive and allows the social actions. Power is referred as a domination, resistance and highly productive in human discourse. Power is recognized as a hegemonic system. According to Foucault power is not a delimiting force, but rather it is generative and productive of social relations and identities, power is universal, repressive and produces subjects. Power is a network of forces which formulate individuals, institution and discourses of history, fiction, memory, truth, identity and knowledge.

#### **According to Edward Said**

Imperialism means the practice, the theory, and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan Centre ruling a distant territory. Colonialism which is almost always a consequence of imperialism is the implanting of settlement on distant territory. (Cultural and Imperialism, 23)

History means a study of long succession of wars for control over some one's power, wealth and imposes one's religion on other people. Race, religion, caste, prejudices of culture and custom which are the structure of hierarchy people to show themselves are superior to others. Therefore hierarchy people followed racism, castism, cultural, custom, etc. In this novel John Masters focused the dominant attitude towards the powerless people. Readers can understand it from this passage.

Joanna, will you please remember to call Indians by their race and caste, or, if you don't know, 'natives'?' ... "God damn it, you ought to know better. We of the Company's service live here all our working lives. We do our work and enjoy ourselves and lord it over the country entirely by the goodwill of the average native—especially the native soldier, the sepoy. If you even think of them insultingly, of course they know it and resent it— (Night Runners of Bengal, 19-20)

British were cunning people and hypocrisy people. British came to India. They looked India with orientalism eyes. British became the master to the native people John Masters exactly presented in the novel.

When he considered the power created by those English merchants who had striven here and made themselves the masters of princes. Two hundred and forty-eight years ago their envoys had come to Agra and begged the Great Mogul to let them build a trading post beside the sea. A century ago they bowed and scraped for the favour of the King of Oudh. Today, by luck and aggressive skill, by courage and persevering deceit, their footholds had so expanded that their Presidency of Bengal alone extended seventeen hundred miles from Burma to Afghanistan, and seven hundred miles from the Himalaya to the Nerbudda.(23)

British did great things such as railways, telegraphy post and dams with the help of poor natives of India in order to enjoy the trade. John Masters's interpretation to the reader is

Colleen was a symbol herself—a country-bred carriage horse, trotting peacefully down a road made in some dim past by Indian slaves, rebuilt and maintained now by English engineers; trotting on, clip-clop, clip-clop, heedless alike of the Mogul ghosts, the brocaded hunters, the Mahratta horsemen, the centuries of pillage and destruction which had surged up and down this road. No more now though: the land lay quiet under a strong hand. The railways crept west from Calcutta, the telegraph posts strode across the millet fields, the dams rose in the rivers. (24)

British people acted as a humanist person, civilized person, orientalist. But in the reality they acted cunningly. Thus British called as a hypocrisy race. In India British behaved as superior beings but they were immoralist for maintaining power. In this novel readers can understand it clearly from these lines.

Rajahs are so rich and autocratic that I'd expected them to be even more cut off from the common people than we are. It is not so. If something worried his people, the Rajah felt it. I think the crows, and what the Silver Guru said, worried all the Indians who were by the tree—so it ought to worry us, because we're supposed to be their friends, as well as their rulers. (28)

British people were unfavorable person to the native people. They treated the native people as a slave. It was unpleasant to the native people.

He caught himself up and looked sharply at her. He always did it, always gave these damned visitors and Queen's officers their opening to sneer at Anglo-Indian enthusiasm, to say something about "faithful blacks" and "doglike devotion (30)

John Masters portrayed scandalously the British mind set and administration in India.

The people have for centuries been the toads under the harrows of a lot of vicious rajahs. Never again. They can look forward to peace for about the first time in the whole of India's history. Think what that means to a man who needs all his energy, all his life, to get a living out of this soil." "Is that really all he thinks of?()

The power people acted deliberated as a master. The powerless people acted as a slave in front of the power people. In this novel John Masters presented the slavery concepts to the readers.

Doesn't he want to be his own master?" "Perhaps, if it were possible. But first he wants peace, and protection—which means power—and we're giving them to him." He filled his glass and went on. "That's why it's right—but

sometimes I feel ashamed. Take this very Bhowani Territory. It used to be part of Kishanpur State, as I expect you heard when you were there. We took it on a forced lease—in perpetuity—but we really have no right here. Yet now the peasants and the lower castes generally would do anything rather than revert to Kishanpur rule and——”(31-32)

The power people were killed for their power and crime. Mostly they were killed for power. John Masters project this idea in this novel.

Gentlemen, I will be brief. I have news that His Highness the Rajah of Kishanpur was assassinated today. He was thrown over the inner battlements of his fort into the courtyard, and died instantly.” Rodney glanced round, but all the faces were expressionless. “There appears to have been a palace plot to remove both the Rajah and his only legitimate son, an infant, and place on the gaddi another, much older son by a concubine—though how the murderer expected to achieve recognition by the Governor General, I am at a loss to understand.(35)

The power people never believed even their own children, wife, and relatives. But the victim believed the victor as a God to them. They were faithful to their Kings. In this novel John Masters acknowledged it.“Kishanpur, and a devoted servant and trusted friend of the late Rajah. He has come. This gentleman here is His Excellence Shivarao Bholkar, the Dewan of here in person to bring me this sad intelligence.” (35)The victor never believed anybody else in the world, because they would fight for power and heir. In this novel John Masters noted it from the character Mr. Dellamain.

Mr. Dellamain continued: “Her Highness the Rani was luckily able to take the assassins red-handed, and so save her infant son, the heir. Thereafter, she appears to have acted with considerable—er—energy. She at once ordered the ringleaders to be garroted—thirty-five of them, I think.”(36)

British created riot among the native in the name of peace. It is an example for that.“The treaty of 1809 makes my duty clear. We must keep the peace in Kishanpur until we have time to find the facts, recognize a new ruler, and see him firmly established. Is your army affected, Dewan?”(37)The power people never allow other person to handle or take over the power. The power people can do anything for maintaining the power. Readers can understand the real facts from this passage in his novel.

Caroline Langford lowered her eyes to his. “We haven’t leased all of Kishanpur. Why do we interfere?” Rodney answered wearily, “We—the Company—can’t permit the endless succession-murders and civil wars that there used to be in the states. We don’t allow any rajah to mount the gaddi until we have recognised him as the lawful heir to his state. Then we’ve forbidden many states—including Kishanpur—to have a big army; it might be dangerous. Well, when we prevent a rajah from defending himself, we have to undertake to do it for him—and we do.”(38)

British imposed their cultural, custom and religion upon the native people. British treated native people so unpleasant manners. British forced the Indian soldiers to follow Christian religion and forbid the cultural practice of the native people. it cause the Indian mutiny. “The mob surged, like fish in a crowded channel, and were pushed slowly forward. Ahead, where they were not directly in contact with the sepoys, they did not know why the pressure kept moving them on.”(53)But British forced the native people to withdraw the riot. They put it down. British controlled the native people.

He looked up quickly as Rodney entered. “Well, was it serious?” Rodney laughed shortly. “It was nothing at all. Someone had set fire to a shack in the square, and they were throwing a few bricks. Of course it might have got worse, but

as it was the Kishanpur troops could have put it down easily.”(57)

In this novel John Masters presented the female character Sumitra and portrayed the rani in whom how the power was played against the British in India.

Prithvi Chand raised his voice. “What a row! You know the miss sahib—Langford, wasn’t it?—who was here six months last year? She an’ the Rani hated each other, ‘cos they’re so much ‘like.” Rodney opened his mouth to protest. “Oh, yes, Captain. One’s Indian, one’s English—one has power do what she likes, other wants it. But why you find us easy—tha’s because you fit in, yet you’re still English as goddamn—”(62)

The native rulers became the slave and surrendered to the British feet. Hence the Rani of Krishnapur who stated these lines.

He felt her stiffen, then at once relax. She left the hand resting on his arm and sighed. “I am sorry. I forget sometimes that I am not the queen of your English Company. But I wish to know. I have never been in any camp; they would not let me. When I go out to Kishan Falls on Monday, it will be the first time. Tell me about it.” (68)

British followed “dived and rule policy” in India. Hence British never allow the native rules to keep the covenant with the native rulers. “In his father’s time such a gathering of princes would never have been permitted. It could have meant only intrigue or war. Now—the Company was strong, and the princes had to amuse themselves with mass tiger-hunting.”(71)

The native rulers believed that British efficient officers were capable rulers to rule the native people. Thus John Masters projected it. “Captain Savage, I want to free my Dewan for his other duties. I want you to command my army, instead of him. I have decided that no one but a British officer can make it efficient, and I want it to be.”(74) John Masters described the power people and the structure of their life in this novel.

That Installation, or enthronement, or whatever you’d call it, was one of the most gorgeous sights I’ve ever seen,” Geoffrey interrupted eagerly. “And do you know what I noticed most? The gold stripes down the Lieutenant Governor’s and Dellamain’s trousers! The rajahs and maharajahs and nawabs and courtiers and all the rest of them were lavish, brilliant—but formless. Then, in the front row, those two in plain blue civil uniforms, and if you half-closed your eyes the stripes down the outsides of their trousers—broad gold stripes—absolutely dominated everything. They were so—disciplined.”(77)

In this novel Rodney was a hero. “He started, looked up, and suppressed a desire to swear.”(81) In this novel John Masters tried rebuilt the history as well as the power structure.

Partly because she knew the old Rajah exceptionally well; he was her father. I’d heard that too, and Sitapara confirmed it. Her mother was a famous courtesan. The Rajah fell in love with her as a young man—and she with him, Sitapara says. At all events, Sitapara hears a lot, or her girls do. She has a dozen of them, and all the court officers go there, get drunk, and talk too much to prove they are in the inner circle at the fort. One of them saw the Rani push her husband off the roof walk. What no one understands is why she murdered him. She had great power, through him. Her little boy is the only heir the Company could possibly recognize. Sitapara’s suggestion is that she is a loose woman, really promiscuous—the kind that must have scores of lovers—and the Rajah found out.”(83)

Human beings always had a desire for getting power. In this novel John Masters explained to get the power to Rani.

She kept her voice flat and unemotional. “Nor did Sitapara, in her own mind. And that leaves the assassination, and all the judicial murders which followed, quite pointless—unless the Rani has such an insane lust for personal power that she did it for that.”(83)

The victors commit the illegal activities when they are in the power. They receive bribe from some other politician, or capitalized. The victims never received the bribe because they don't have authority to do. In this novel the white man got bribes from native rulers.

If they had been bribing him for a long time, the murder might have been long-planned, and the bribes the price of Dellamain's support for the Rani in official quarters. It made a big difference exactly which of the three was giving the bribes. But again, why the murder at all? Who benefited? The bribes could be for something else. There was the salt monopoly to encourage smuggling; rajahs did slip jewels to British officials who “forgot” to apprise the Governor General of their more outrageous vices and extortions. The girl had uncovered a real dungheap in her determination to drag Sumitra down. And what could she know of all the circumstances to be so self-righteous? (84-85)

Who are the master to whom ?.The natives are slaves and alien people are masters to the natives. British became masters and the natives became slaves. “The company was too big to know everything, and too powerful to relish having the fact underlined by one of its own servants.” (97)In this novel Rodney was white man and the Rani Sumittra is native ruler. Reader can see the slave and master concepts.

Anyway, he wasn't going to accept Rani's offer. She raised her head. “My lord, I cannot act any longer. I am not English. I cannot even thank you for saving my life. You are my lord and can save me or leave me as you wish. Only look at me kindly.”(97)

John Masters describe the victors and victims of their power and knowledge in this novel.

Rodney felt no fear for himself. In that second there was no room for anything but disgrace. He stood among them and sank into a slimy lake of shame. All that he was had failed. The English in India had failed England; the Bengal Army had failed its faith, his regiment its glory; he had failed these men; they, who were a part of him, had failed themselves.(224)

Indian sepoy's made a terrible riot that was Indian mutiny but the British power put it down. “The riot's begun, Captain-sahib! A terrible riot in the city. I've told the Commissioner, and he says the sepoy's will put it down. He gave me a note for you.”(51)

The research paper provided insight to the readers about the power and knowledge of the past in novel *Night runners of Bengal*. Readers understand the dominant socio-cultural perspectives and dominant culture in the society. This article examined the power and the knowledge of victors and victims through John Masters's interpretation.

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