

## SYMBOLISM OF IMPERIALISM IN ORWELL'S SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT

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**Abstract** : The purpose of this study aimed to reveal the symbolism of imperialism in Orwell's shooting an elephant. The research is categorized as qualitative research since the data were in the form of words and the data was collected from the primary source that is the novel itself, and the secondary sources were from the books, references, and other sources such as the internet that could support this research. This proposed study can be viewed from at least two different angles. First, in term of the data, this study is qualitative in nature in that the data will be in the form of words or quotations, and the analysis will be in narrative form. Secondly, in terms of sources data and how the data is interpreted, the study can also be categorized as a content analysis. The result of this research is revealing the symbols or signs that which is an act of imperialism that happened in Burma through of some important things about imperialism itself such as; The conquest of Burma and British power, The economic exploitation, and The Spread of religion or ideology.

**Keywords:** *Symbolism, Imperialism, Orwell, Semiotic approach*

## INTRODUCTION

"Literature is a uniquely human activity, born of a man's timeless desire to understand, express, and finally share experiences" (Pickering, James and Hoeper, Jeffrey D, 1981). Besides, literature is called the work of written expression. Literature is a work of art that tells the elements of the story by displaying emotions,

expressions, and language-related to human life. Literature is authentic material. It is true that literary text is not created for the primary purpose of meeting the need of foreign language learner. Many authentic samples of language used and conversed in real-life contexts are found in relevance to the proposition that language is a medium of expressing ideas in literature (Maru, 2009).

In literature there are so many literary works, literary work was actually made not only to entertain but it was also created purposely to educate the readers in some ways. (Wuntu, 2015) said that "A literary work which has affective nature is a significant power to touch the deepest sense that can produce perfect consciousness as it successfully carries out its mission as a form generator of human consciousness". (Sabudu, 2014) states that literature is the reflection of human life whether in the society or in their private life, every phenomenon that found in the society usually reflects in the literary works such as poem, novel, drama or short story.

The history of British imperialism in Burma located between India (Bangladesh) and Thailand was described with using symbols by George Orwell who took a job with the Burmese civil service as a police officer. In his short story *Shooting the Elephant*, Orwell describes his works as the sub-divisional police officer of Moulmein, a town in the British colony of Burma. The elephant is the central symbol of the story. In the story, (Jenkins, 2012) put it, "Orwell's uses of symbolism to present his message through a narrative." Orwell uses it to represent the effect of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized.

The elephant, like a colonized populace, has its liberty restricted, and it becomes violently rebellious only as a response to being shackled. In the one hand, Orwell, a colonizer, feels a similar ambivalence towards the elephant as he does towards the Burmese locals, as reflected in his statement, "Theoretically and secretly of course, I was always for the Burmese and all against the oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear".

On the other hand, he still perpetuates barbarous treatment of both, simply in order to uphold an irrational standard of imperial behavior. He kills the elephant simply because he fears that he would be humiliated if he failed to do so.

As pointed out earlier, Orwell uses symbols as literary devices to represent his points of view about the British imperialism in Burma. These symbols need to be identified and clarified in order that we as readers may have a clear picture about the British imperialism in Burma and its influence on Burmese.

## **METHOD**

Qualitative method is most suitable method to be used in analyzing novel (Maru, M, G, Wowor J, D, Arisudana, 2018). This proposed study can be viewed from at least two different angles. First, in term of the data, this study is qualitative in nature in that the data will be in the form of words or quotations, and the analysis will be in narrative form. Secondly, in terms of sources data and how the data is interpreted, the study can also be categorized as a content analysis. Content analysis can be quantitative or qualitative. This study is a qualitative content analysis which is defined as “A research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

### ***Data Collection***

The data in this research will be collected from two different sources: primary sources and Secondary sources. The primary source refers to in the short story itself, *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell. The secondary sources will be books or references related to History of Burma, colonialism, British imperialism in Burma (and India), the writer’s biography, and other related references.

### ***Data Analysis***

In analyzing the data, the writer used semiotics approach by Peirce because this research focuses on the symbol or sign that written in this short story. "Something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity". These signs may include sounds, words, and everything that could give guidance as a process of communication, like a house, shirt, and every symbol with meaning (Sobur, 2003). The statement above means that (1) the sign in the narrow sense, also referred to as the representamen, that which represents something else; (2) the object, that which the sign stands for, that which is represented by it; (3) the (possible or potential) which may materialize as its translation. This analysis focuses on symbols or sign that have a specific object and the meaning of that symbol.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***The conquest of Burma and British power***

The following are some of the actions taken by the British occupation forces when they carried out the expansion of imperial in Burma, namely by forcibly taking technological advances from the British Empire.

*"When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick one never does when a shot goes home".(6)*

*"In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down".(6)*

The statement above stands for symbol which relates to elephant as its object. Elephant in this shooting event are a picture of the Burma's population, and it describes about the first war that occurred in 1823-1826 in Burma, where the British

wanted to occupy Burma but there was resistance from the Burmese so that the British had not fully controlled the place. Very clearly describes the elephant that was shot still standing and not falling. Here the Burmese tried to fight back with their own means to prevent the British from taking over them. With this resistance the British resisted the attack and devised a strategy to strike back.

British hopes of subduing Burma by taking control of the delta region and threatening the capital failed as Burmese resistance stiffened. In 1825 British Indian troops advanced north. In the battle south of Ava, the Burmese general Bandula was killed and his troops were mobilized. The Treaty of Yandabo (February 1826) officially ended the First Anglo-Burmese War. The British victory has been achieved largely because India's superior resources have enabled a sustained campaign that spans two rainy seasons. But in the fighting, British-led Indian forces have suffered more than 15,000 casualties.

*"One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping." (6)*

The statement above stands for symbol which relates to Elephant as its object. Very clear that the second shot at the elephant is a depiction of the second war in Burma. The elephant that seemed to have fallen tried to get up but looked very difficult to stand up, so did the Burmese trying to defend their land but the British hesitated to advance further north; with both sides deadlocked, the fighting simply stopped. The British now occupied all of lower Burma but without official recognition from the Burmese court.

*"I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he*

*seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time.”(7)*

The statement above stands for symbol which relates to Elephant as its object. The quote above explains that the last war between England and Burma resulted in the destruction of Burma under the Konbaung Dynasty, which had previously lost the territory known as Upper Burma, the territory of Lower Burma which was annexed by the British in 1853. The last sentence in the statement above that the elephant made a sound through its trunk signifies the Burmese surrender and chooses to submit to British rules.

*“The magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching”.(5)*

*They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. (3).*

*I took my rifle, an old 44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant.(3)*

The statement above stands for symbol which relates to weapon as its object. Magical rifle is an explanation at that time Britain already had technological sophistication such as firearms, that period was the development of technology in the form of firearms and communication tools. In this case the British fully controlled the Burmese kingdom with the advancement of British technology in the military.

*“With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of prostrate people; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts. “(1)*

The statement above stands for symbol which relates to British imperial as its object. explaining the events after Burma was defeated, the British established a

kingdom in the center of Burma and started a colony to be assigned to occupy areas around Burma, after which the British made Burma a province and separated from India, also explained that the power of the British Empire could not be destroyed, because many British colonial troops were brought directly to Burma with complete weapons and war vehicles.

*"In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters, the wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey". (1)*

*"Cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been Bogged with bamboos – all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt". (1)*

The statement above stands for a symbol which relates to Burmese as its object. The purpose of the above explanation is an example of British rule where people who fought during the English and Burmese wars were punished and imprisoned. Not only that, this person was tortured before being imprisoned. Also explained that their faces were gray to mean that their faces were already pale from the torture of gun blows that made the prisoners' faces bleed.

### ***The Economic exploitation by the British***

Economic exploitation aimed at the excessive use of something for the benefit of the British and not considering the impact on the colonized country.

*"One day something was happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism – the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar".(2)*

The statement above stands for a symbol which relates to bazaar as its object. Statement above very clearly explained above that elephant damage the bazaar, elephants symbolize the power and greatness of the British Empire as known it symbolizes the economy of Burma or the livelihoods of Burma. Britain controlled the Burma trade in the form of spices which became part of the profits for the British kingdom to be traded to various regions including China. At that time the British played an important role in the formation of government and power and got the right to regulate trade and the desired final destination, while the British far got their place in the field of trade and services, while the natives were the groups who were oppressed to carry out orders from the colonial rulers. In its development, there are government policies in trade and the economy that are profitable for the natives as well as the results of government collaboration with family-based corporations which in the end creates a corrupt and corrupt relationship nepotistic.

*"It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock;" (3)*

*"It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palmleaf, winding all over a steep hillside. (3)*

The statement above stands for a symbol which relates to Burmese place of business as its object. Statement above that elephants are devouring and depleting supplies is a depiction of economic pressure of Burma, where the British carried out massive exploitation of the agricultural sector. The British government forced or involved Burma to fill the shortage and made the Burmese people forced labor to produce rice, as well as holding staple spices and other raw materials. At that time rice and spices or raw materials were the main sources used by the British government. Because of that the life of the natives is getting worse it shows the bad and poor environmental life because living under British rule. People live in squalor

while the British happily rule over Burma. Squalid bamboo aims to explain how unworthy the place they occupy. They are forced to live in a terrible slum environment.

### ***Spread of religion or Ideology by the British***

Imperialism is not only based on power and resources, but also includes the influence of British beliefs in which they try to spread religion or ideology to the colonized nation or Burmese people.

*"This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony". (3)*

The statement above stands for a symbol which relates to Burmese as its object. Statement above is very clear about how the strong British influence made Burma submit. In this case about beliefs or ideologies which at that time England held full Christian beliefs. The above statement is an illustration of where the British put their faith, namely Christianity to the Burmese people. In the 16th century, Christianity was introduced by traders from Portugal. In the process of spreading religion by the Portuguese it was not perfect because after the Portuguese retreated, the Burmese people returned to what was their right to believe. In 1886 the British ruled over Burma. In 1886 the British ruled over Burma. The influence of Christianity is very large, on the other hand if they do not follow English teachings, they will be tortured and even sentenced to death.

*"I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat."(7)*

*"legally, I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed."(7)*

The statement above stands for a symbol which relates to Elephant as its object. The statement above the elephant for the Burmese is a sacred being, where the elephant is also a reflection of a god named Ganesh in Buddhist teachings. The British saw what they believed was wrong, because in Christianity, worship of idols or gods was idols. In Christians, it is not willed by God. The incident of shooting an elephant is a reflection or picture where the British want to change or make a change to the Burmese people to convert to Christianity. The result of this research is revealing the symbols or signs that which is an act of imperialism that happened in Burma through of some important things about imperialism itself such as; The conquest of Burma and British power, The economic exploitation, and The Spread of religion or ideology.

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