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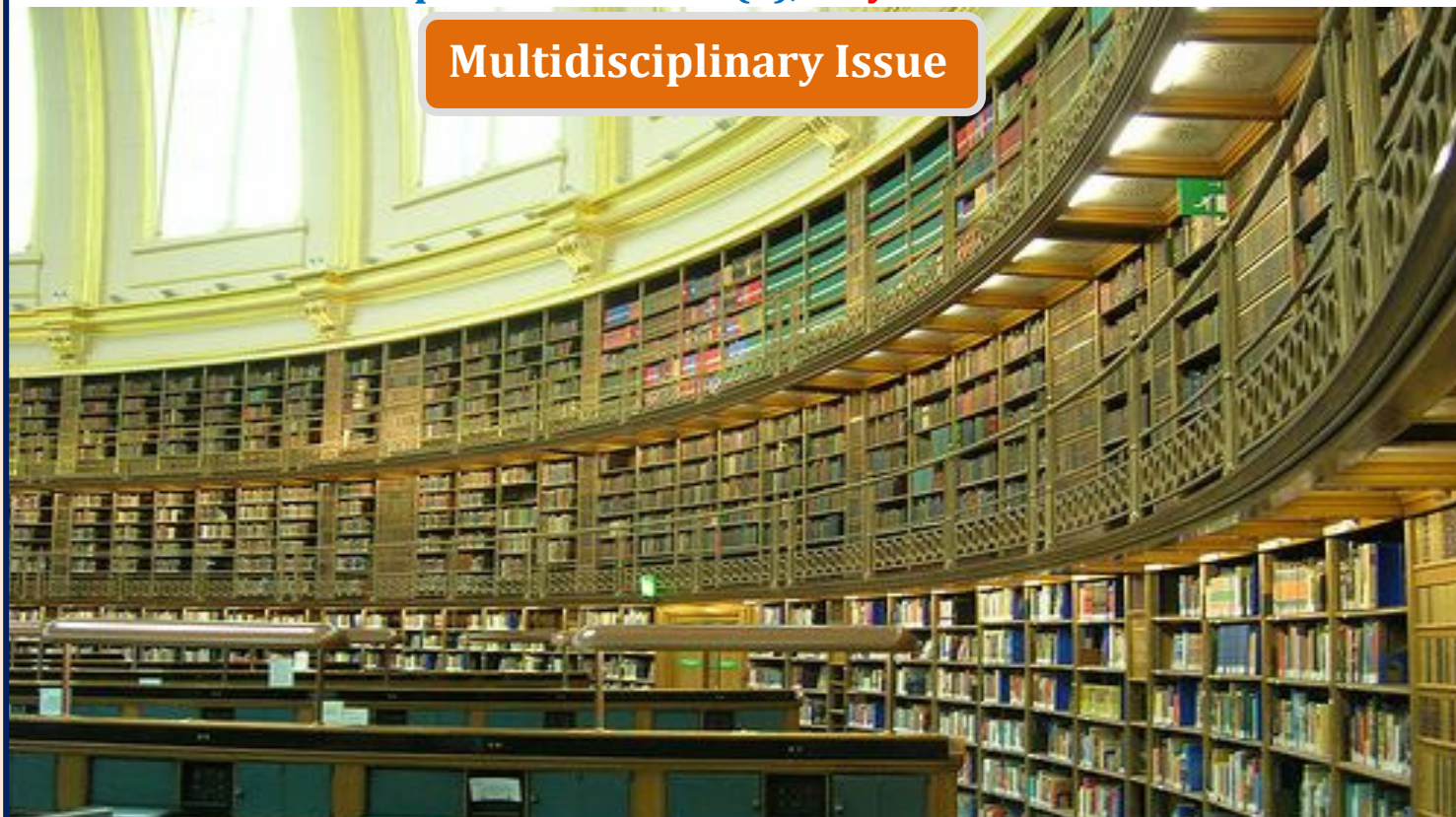
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*- Chief & Executive Editor*

## Neocolonialism in Nuruddin Farah's Sweet and Sour Milk

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Assistant Professor of English,  
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### Abstract :

*This paper attempts to focus on causes, consequences and response to neocolonialism in postcolonial Somalia as depicted in Nuruddin Farah's Sweet and Sour Milk, the first novel in his trilogy entitled 'Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship'. Somalia's political independence from the European colonisers does not bring about any positive change in any aspect of the lives of common masses. The novelist vividly reflects influence on and interference of dominant foreign imperial power in internal and external affairs of the nation. Local elites' collaborate with foreign power in exploitation of their country's resources and create and maintain tyrannical regime in the country. The ordinary people suffer from corruption, exploitation, oppression and suppression of fundamental human rights by the dictatorial government. Most of the citizens surrender to the dominating force and accept their miserable condition and a very few educated and sensitive citizens protest against it.*

**Key words:** neocolonialism, corruption, domination, suppression, resistance

Neocolonialism is a geo-political practice in which developed countries establish and maintain hegemonic relationship with the formerly colonised or developing countries and indirectly influence their internal and external affairs of such weaker nations in order to exploit their resources. Imperial and capitalistic powers especially in global north use global economic power and economic system to exploit resources of the countries in global south. Consequently, the economically weaker countries with merely political independence become too dependent on richer countries mainly for economic and political issues and the citizens of such countries suffer from political, economic and social oppression and suppression of fundamental rights. Edward Said appropriately argues that "The nations of contemporary Asia, Latin America, and Africa are politically independent but in many ways are as dominated and dependent as they were ruled directly by European powers." (Said 20)

Nuruddin Farah's novel Sweet and Sour Milk is a tale of a young dentist Loyaan's search for the cause of his twin brother Soyaan's mysterious death and in doing so he encounters and understands socio-political reality in the country. The novel begins with Soyaan's fatal illness caused by a mysterious drug and his eventual death. He serves as the economic advisor of the government. He works as a member of underground revolutionary movement composed of Somali intellectuals and professionals. Loyaan is gradually drawn into personal investigation of the mysterious circumstances around his brother's death and finally, he learns that his brother was killed by the regime because he secretly wrote and distributed anti-government pamphlets.

Political independence does not bring about any positive change in the lives of common people in Africa. Their dreams, which they believed the independence will fulfill, are shattered just within few years after independence and eventually, it brought a big wave of disillusionment in the African continent. The newly independent countries in Africa continued to be economically dependent on their former colonial power or on other neocolonial institutions like international financial organisation and multinational corporations. Fanon argues that "The

formerly colonised territory is now turned into an economically dependent country. The former coloniser, which has kept intact and, in some cases, reinforced its marketing channels, agrees to inject small doses into independent nation's budget in order to sustain it." (Fanon 55)

Officially Somalia is a sovereign democratic republic, so democracy should be practiced in the country. It is run as a kind of neocolonial satellite state of the Soviet Union. Instead there is autocratic socialism strongly influenced and advised by the Soviet Union and everything in the country is controlled by the Russians. The union controls and manages everything in the nation to serve its interests and purposes. Soyaan asks the security office: 'I mean is there a service within the Service, a service especially created to keep a particular eye on Soviet interests in the country, report on anti-Soviet activities, a service financed and paid for by the Soviets?' (ibid 223)

There is a very strong presence of colonial consciousness in the novel. Margaritta is an Italian woman who works in one of the Somali government's offices and she being an insider is very well aware of the real nature of the government. She has very good knowledge Africa's colonial past and neocolonial present. She clearly explains how African people were tortured and exploited by the all European colonisers during the period of colonisation and how the departing colonial masters handed over the continent in hands of native elites behave in the same manner as that of the colonial masters.

Margaritta explains Loyyan that the condition of the African continent got worsened in 1970s due to army coups and tyrannical dictatorships. The dictators and army chiefs use same inhuman methods of oppression and torture like the cruel colonisers. The African elites who had shown a dream of beautiful and peaceful Africa are either in prison or have left the country due to such unfavorable condition in the continent. Dr. Musse informs Loyaan the unlawful nature and functioning of the internal security service in the country. Illiterate and untrained people are recruited as the security personnel and they are not used for maintaining law and order and peace in the country, instead they are misused for spreading confusion and terror among the citizens. The security personnel do not follow legal procedure. Official record of most of the prisoners is not kept at all and improperly kept of some of the prisoners.

There is either wastage or brain drain of quality local human resource available in the country. Huge amount of quality human resource is available in the country among the native population, but it is not valued and utilised at all whereas it is totally ignored and wasted. So many native Somali intellectuals, professionals and technicians are caught and put in prison and so many have left the country due to fear of detention. Moreover, foreign intellectuals, professionals and technicians recruited in their place and paid more, due to a very heavy foreign influence in the neocolony. Eventually, it causes huge economic and social loss. Dr. Ibrahim Musse describes this reality to Loyaan:

'There is also another Memorandum which Soyaan wrote under the insistent solicitation of one of the Vice-Presidents. The idea of this was to prove scientifically how uneconomical it is to let so many of the nation's intellectuals and professionals languish in prisons when in their places we employ Soviet technocrats and Cuban sugarcane experts. A great many of the nation's professionals, intellectuals and technicians have left the country for fear they would be imprisoned, tortured or badly treated. This is well-documented statement which Soyaan made.' (ibid 149)



Strong foreign influence and interference in the politics and economy of a weak and dependent country is one of the most prominent characteristics of a neocolonial nation-state. Frantz Fanon argues that: "The formerly colonised territory is now turned into an economically dependent country. The former coloniser, which has kept intact and, in some cases, reinforced its marketing channels, agrees to inject small doses into independent nation's budget in order to sustain it." (Fanon 55) Russian influence and interference in the internal affairs of Somalia is clearly evident in the novel, we see it when Soyaan and ten religious leaders are killed secretly on the advice of Russian advisers. The native leaders allow foreign neocolonial forces to influence and interfere in the internal affairs of the country. It worsens socio-political and economic conditions of such nations. Loyaan rightly describes the pathetic condition of Somalia and destructive consequences of Russian influence:

'But one thing is definitely clear,' he said to himself. 'Somalia is a prison. We are the prisoners; the Security, the Green Guards, are the jailors; and the General, the Grand Warder of them all.' ... 'Soviet influence is like polluted oil a huge tanker has leaked. It will spread and pollute every waterway in the Red Sea and surroundings. The fish they haven't already cleaned out of our seas will die of this, just imagine: hundreds of tons a day...' (ibid 210)

Nuruddin Farah shows that the intelligent people, especially those who work in the government system, are very well aware of the dictatorial nature of the so called socialist government and they raise voice against oppressive regime. Soyaan, the protagonist, is one of the revolutionary people in the novel. He says to his father: "I am no bearer of anybody's banner, but I feel humiliated. I feel abused, daily, minutely. A friend of mine is in for anti-Soviet activities. But where are we? What ear is this? Is this Africa or is this Stalin's Russia? I am disgusted. As soon as I feel better, I promise you..." (ibid 11)

Farah shows betrayal of trust of fellow citizens and also the betrayal of socialist ideals by the elites in the country. The totalitarian kind of government in the country alters history as per its convenience under the name of bringing about socialist revolution in the country. The true revolutionary people like Soyaan and the ten religious leaders are killed and called as the heroes of the socialist revolution.

Soyaan is the most tactful and careful person when it comes to personalizing details of one's public life. He is a quiet, reserved, well-read and a very conscientious man. He had been for many years the Economic Adviser to the Presidency, responsible directly to answerable only to the General. When Soyaan, a revolutionary on his deathbed, realizes that he is going to die soon, he advises his brother, Soyaan, to inform common people clearly in the common man's language the true nature of the government. He says to Soyaan:

The demystification of information. Tell the masses in the simplest of terms what is happening. Demystify politics. Empty those heads filled with tons of rhetoric. Uncover hiding behind pregnant letters such as KGB, CIA or other wicked alphabet of mysteries. Do you understand now?' ... 'In the underground prison the East Germans have constructed. A super-prison as aid from one Soviet satellite but really fascist Somalia. (ibid 16)

Tyrannical government uses its police force to spread terror in the country. Several innocent citizens are arrested, harassed and tortured without any valid reason, crime or misdeed committed by them. Everybody is suspected of involved in ant-government activity. One of the government employees says: "...What has he done? What has her little clerk of a husband done? But what have all the others done, what have the thousands who languish in prisons done? The



methods of the General and of the KGB are not dissimilar, I can tell you that. Instructions: know who do not know you. Plant seeds of suspicion in every thinking brain and hence render it unthinking.” (ibid 37)

Farah reveals indifferent attitude of the educated native youth to the debasement of their nation and their fellow citizens. They like to work in the interests of the neocolonial masters and cooperate in the exploitation of their own country. It is very pathetic that such highly educated young men, other privileged people and civil servants in the country do not show any concern about the acute and burning issues in society and in the nation. They do not seem to be interested in nation's well-being; instead they are interested in merry making and enjoying their lives.

The tyrannical and oppressive government takes undue advantage of the indifferent attitude of most of the educated young men in the country. The government very tactfully handles and diverts attention of such youth. All privileged people, civil servants in Somalia are not at all, only a very few like Soyaan try to oppose. Keynaan tells his son Loyaan about it: “No young man of your age, you hear me? The General fears no threat which might come from you and your lot. You have no common ideology for which you fight. You have no organized protest. Skirts. Air Ticket to Europe. Posh cars. These are what you are after. The Security provides them. And you are no threat. Not one young man of your age from the civilian quarters.” (ibid 99)

Farah shows that there is no tradition of protest movements of citizens, workers or students in the country and there are no unions of people also who fight for their rights and fight against their exploitation. Due to hostile and insecure atmosphere in the country, common citizens fear to protest and try to stay away and save themselves. Very few sensible and vigilant native intellectuals and government officers like Soyaan and Loyaan are very well aware of the oppression and exploitation of their innocent fellow citizens by the tyrannical government in the country. They do not succumb to any temptation and even they do not surrender to any internal or external dominant force. Moreover, they peacefully protest against all kinds of cruelty and domination and they want to serve only for their nation. Dr. Ibrahim Musse tells Loyaan about the work of their underground revolutionary movement:

So. Soyaan and I drew up a list of ten intellectuals whom we thought we could trust, whom we thought we could engage in collaboration with us. And what did we ask of these ten whom we invited to our meeting? ... We want you to collect information for a common pool... We will disseminate the information received in that manner, we will eventually publish our findings, we will distribute them gratis in cyclostyled format, we will start with the General himself.’ (ibid 152)

Dr. Ibrahim Musse tells Loyaan about the purpose and nature of their underground revolutionary movement. The members of the revolutionary movement have not lost their courage and determination to work and fight for the country, even after Soyaan has been secretly killed by the tyrannical General. They want to continue their work in future also. Dr. Ibrahim Musse tells Loyaan about it:

“...We would meet once a month to report on the progress made in whatever we were working on individually or collectively... We were ten to start with..Some have spoken to you since Soyaan's death. Some are out of country. Some are in prison. But the important thing is that we are vigilant and that we are all the more conscious politically despite what has happened, despite Soyaan's death. Anyway...” (ibid 151)

Loyaan continues Soyaan's the revolutionary work against the oppression of tyrannical Head of the State and his government. The President realises that there is a threat from Loyaan, he uses an usual tactic of bribe to silence Loyaan by offering him a very good position abroad. Keynaan tells Loyaan about how the government handles such anti-government people: 'There are other methods at their disposal. They don't have to shoot you and make you a hero more valued than Soyaan, or imprison you here in this country. There are other methods.' (ibid 261) Those who try to oppose the tyrannical rule are arrested, tortured and some of them are even killed by the regime. The General and his aides silence some of them either bribing them with good positions or by killing them secretly. However, the brave revolutionaries do not succumb to any temptations or threats and continue their good work for the country. They protest against the oppression of their fellow citizens and exploitation of resources of the country.

Loyaan confronts the President at the end of the novel and asks questions about his oppression of his innocent fellow citizens in the country. Soyaan asks to the General: "Yes, it is constitutional to pass laws, sign decrees, run a martial-law government and then sentence these sheikhs to death. It is against the teaching of the Koran on which they base their arguments." (ibid 251). The general gets annoyed over Loyaan's question and his reply to it shows his tyrannical nature. The General's says to Soyaan: 'Well in that case, have I introduced myself to you, young man? I am the constitution. Now you know who I am, and I want you out of here before I set those dogs of mine on you and you are torn to pieces. Out.' (ibid 251)

Farah suggests that the sensible and educated people should think that the threat and loss to the nation from foreign elements as well as the people in power like the President is much higher than the threat to the individuals and loss of their lives. Loyaan comes to know from Dr. Musse that his brother, Loyaan was a member of underground revolutionary movement which works to overthrow the tyrannical General. He realises that his brother sacrificed his life for the country. Like his brother, Loyaan is also a courageous and well-educated young man and he too, when asked about participating in the movement, immediately shows his willingness to be a part of the movement. His willingness shows that he too is ready for the struggle and willing to sacrifice his life for the nation.

The responsibility is equally shouldered by the men and women like Soyaan, Loyaan, Dr. Musse, Medina, Samater and Mulki. They reveal different methods and tactics used by the neocolonial power to maintain its control and dominance. The revolutionary people expose the corrupt and tyrannical nature of the government and; peacefully and systematically prepare documentary evidences needed to overthrow such an oppressive government.

### **Conclusion:**

Farah has realistically and bravely portrayed neocolonialism in Somalia in the novel. He has valiantly depicted various aspects of neocolonialism, its impact and resistance to it. He has revealed the foreign influence in the politics of the country. In Democratic Republic of Somalia, tyrannical autocracy is practiced under the name of scientific socialism imposed by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's interference is seen everywhere in the nation. The local government, its leader and its officers work in the interest of the Soviet Union, a foreign neocolonial power and exploit and torture their own citizens on the advice and instructions given by the neocolonial power.

Farah suggests that well-educated citizens of the country should take initiative to put up a very strong resistance against the injustice and oppression of their fellow citizens and



exploitation of human and other natural resources of the country. He gives the responsibility to the highly educated characters, especially those working in the government of exposing local and foreign neocolonial forces at work in the country and to fight back against them and to eradicate them completely.

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