

ASPECTS OF NEOCOLONIALISM IN NURUDDIN FARAH'S SARDINES

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ABSTRACT:

The research article aims to explore neocolonialism and resistance to it in postcolonial Somali society as reflected in Nuruddin Farah's Sardines. It is the second novel in his trilogy entitled as 'Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship'. Most of the colonised nations achieved merely political independence and not complete independence in all respects. The resources of formerly colonised, developing and poor countries are still controlled and exploited by the rich and powerful countries in the world. The roots of neocolonialism are found in the process of decolonisation and globalisation. Colonial and neocolonial consciousness is clearly evident in the novel. The former colonisers and richer countries try to dominate and oppress resources of weaker and poorer sovereign nations and territories. They use various subtle strategies to achieve their aims and justify their ill motives every time. They always make these sovereign countries depend on them for everything these nations need.

Key words: Neocolonialism, Globalisation, Domination, Exploitation, Resistance

Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines* is a story of inhuman oppression of innocent common citizens by the tyrannical regime in the country and a strong resistance against it. Medina, a well-educated and strong-minded journalist, is the protagonist of the novel. She does not surrender to any pressures and threats in the country and decides to raise voice and fight back against the exploitation of her fellow citizens and resources of her country. She is the leader of the group of revolutionary people who want to liberate their people and their mother land from the clutches of neocolonial powers.

Sovereign nations in Africa are merely political independent and not totally sovereign. They are puppet regimes in the continent which are still controlled and dominated by foreign neocolonial powers. The local heads of these nation-states allow the evil-minded outsiders to interfere in the internal affairs of their independent nation. Moreover, they cooperate in the exploitation of their country's resources by the developed nations. Farah reveals the control and exploitation of Somalia's resources by Italy, the former coloniser of Somalia.

Farah shows that the governments in Africa are neocolonial in nature. They just imitate the physically departed colonial master's ways of ruling the people. They use the proven 'divide and rule policy' of colonisers. They try to keep the people divided in clans and tribes and use these divisions for their political benefits. Medina, protagonist of the novel and a local Somali reporter feels the same about the regimes in Africa: "Sandra always dismissed Africa's

political moves and efforts as “neo-colonialist,” “imitative,” “unstudied and unresearched,” or “tribalistic.” (Farah 231)

Former colonisers like European nations and other developing countries like United States of America, Soviet Union emerged as neocolonial powers. They justify their exploitation of weak and developing countries as they justified colonialism. The most important justification given by them is the backwardness of weak and poor nations. Somalia’s former coloniser Italy took control of Somalia immediately after some years of independence and turned into the role of neocoloniser and blamed the local African regimes for lack of proper planning and ideological base.

The foreign multinational corporations of neocolonial nations take disadvantage of the adverse conditions in the poor and weak countries by earning more and more profit even out of such painful circumstances. The local governments in developing countries do not take such calamities seriously which make their citizens suffer and so they do not study and find solutions to such crisis situations. They just depend on foreign aid and indirectly help the multinationals to grow richer and richer day by day. Median explains this to Naseer: “...Rain causes the outbreak of a hundred and one types of insects about which we in Africa know little... Obviously we cannot find solutions until we know what and who we are dealing with. The American and Soviet and European governments might silence the crying mouths with rice and milk powder. Africa’s malnutrition nourishes the multinationals, and the unstudied three hundred odd insects.” (ibid 115-116)

Foreign neocolonial powers use local leaders and bureaucrats to exploit resources of a weak and developing nation and the corrupt locals elites see this as an opportunity to enrich themselves. The Soviet Union gave different kinds of aids such financial, military, etc. in order to maintain their control and supremacy in Somalia and exploit its natural resources and the corrupt General uses the aides from them to prosper himself. Nasser writes to Medina “.....As for the Soviets, they got what they deserved. They led their little boy by the hand and introduced him to their friends. They used him; they cleaned his coast of its fish; they had their base, etcetera, etcetera. He used them too. He made them train his clansmen; he used them to build himself a system of security, watertight as the KGB. Each imagined the other hadn’t the slightest idea what they were up to... In the end, it is the Soviets who are the losers.” (ibid 25)

Farah exposes various tactics uses by the Head of the state to maintain his dictatorial rule in the country and to suppress every kind of resistance to it. He brings into play use various subtle methods to silence or to remove opponents to his regime. His men do some fake anti-regime activity and his opponents are blamed for it and made to face serious consequences. He shrewdly chooses people as his targets and victims and hits them properly. He bribes some of the people with good positions in the government like Samater and Loyaan and some of them, are arrested, tortured and put in jails for so many years like Mulki and; some of them are killed secretly like Soyaan and made heroes of the revolution.

Divide the citizen along the lines of religion or tribe or clan and rule them is one of major tactics used by the local elites in the neocolonial countries to safeguard their interests and maintain their control and dominance over the citizens. The Head of the state uses tribal or

clan card to control a person or a group of persons eventually to remove opposition or threats to his rule and to sustain power in the country. Furthermore, the divided groups are made to stand against each other and fight for a common goal. Farah, through Sagal's thinking, unfolds this nature of a government in the country: "And the General's power did not only divide to rule but it put together force of diverse political trends and unified their interest. His power played one off against another. It was this fascist regime's maltreating Wentworth George which made her defy her own rules and sleep with him." (ibid 56)

Farah reveals corruption is also rampant in the country and people encourage and vindicate corruption. The local leaders and the elites abuse their power and positions for their self aggrandisement and their relatives also keep similar expectations from them. Since materialism is widespread in the country, people always think in terms of money and other physical luxuries. The near and dear ones expect powerful people such ministers and officers to use their powerful positions for their development rather than that of country. Samater is newly appointed as Minister of Constructions by the General and his mother Idil says:

"And what are you a minister for? How many more months will you hold this important position, occupy the throne of power? Why don't you use it? Why don't you get richer while you can, amass the wealth that is yours by right? Or have you taken to heart what the General says about socialism? Look at your colleagues... Out of your mundanities, you should be in a position to do what a minister rank, mint something worthy of your station. You should be in a position to say: my house, my car, my bank account, my farm, my land. The rest is absolute trivia. Yes, absolute trivia. (ibid 75, 88)

Like Fanon, Farah very harshly criticises intellectuals in the country for their ineffectiveness and for betraying their fellow citizens by telling several lies about their own country. He thinks the intellectuals are responsible for the miserable condition of the nation. Samater's thought reveal this: "We the intellectuals are the betrayers; Thee, so called intellectuals, are the entrance the foreign powers use so as to dominate, designate, name and label; we the intellectuals are the ones who tell our people lies; we tell them that we cannot bake our bricks in home-made kilns whose fire has died. And when the fire of enthusiasm has diminished, what do we do? We don't replace the kiln but those who work it. Then we explain and tell more and more lies. We are the ones that keep dictators in power." (ibid 82)

The representatives of young generation like in the country Medina and Sagal are worried about the future of their next generation. The fraudulent dictator and his deceitful policies everyday bring destruction in every field. Consequently, the present life in the nation is so devastating and disturbing. The ill-natured General and his illiterate and ill-mannered security personnel take care that there is all-pervading insecurity in every citizen's mind. There is complete absence of freedom, equality and dignity for an individual in the society at smaller level like family and at larger level such as country.

The status of women in the Somali society is more miserable and terrible than that of men. There is triple subjection of Somali women- firstly to men in the family, secondly, in the religious life and thirdly, as a woman in a poor and weak country. The women are oppressed and tortured even to take revenge of political enmity. Amina, the victim of a gang rape, tells to her friend, Sagal: "We're doing this not to you but your father... Do you know how many

innocent men of our clan your father has sent to prison, how many he has sentenced to death, and how many his men have tortured?, said one of them.” (ibid 135)

Farah exposes that there is culture and tradition of domination, exploitation and tortures in Somalia. Poor and weak men and men are oppressed in the society as well as in the country, especially women are more victims.

He argues that if there is freedom for an individual in a smaller unit such as family, then there can be freedom at larger levels such society, country and the world. Medina’s father advises her to her freedom to her daughter Ubx: ‘You must leave space in the architecture of your love; you must leave enough room for little Ubx to exercise her growing mind. You mustn’t indoctrinate, mustn’t brainwash her. Otherwise you become another dictator, trying to shape your child in your image. And you don’t want to be that, do you?’ (ibid 17)

Farah reveals that there is betrayal of socialist ideals in the country. There is no socialism at all in any activity of the government. The General and his men make everyone believe that the country is run on the basis of socialist ideology. They just pretend to be socialist. However, the General, his government and other elites in the nation work alongside the ideology of capitalism and tribal allegiances in the nation. They support the capitalism and tribalism secretly for their own benefits. Dulmaan, a theatre actress reveals this to Naseer:

‘....The General says Somalia is socialist, when you ask someone in public what Somalia’s ideology is, the answer is that we are socialist. We pretend we are socialist, we buy the thing we sell to the world. But are we socialist? We say we are when we are in public or when we are with those who don’t know that we are pretending, that we are acting. As soon as the curtain falls on the stage, as soon as we are alone, the mask drops and we talk about the tribal formation of the General’s regime, and we come to claim our share of the loot.’ (ibid 190)

The General always keeps people in the country in confusion. He does not want the people to know the real nature and working of his government whether it is socialist or capitalist in nature. Everything in the country is planned very secretly and announced suddenly and done abruptly. In reality, there is autocratic government in the country and its tyrannical head, the General, always makes sure that there is constant terror and feeling of insecurity in the minds of the citizens in the country in order to sustain his control over the people and his rule in the nation. All the people, who are may pose a threat to the general and his regime like political opponents, tribal leaders and intellectuals, are imprisoned and tortured for not committed offense.

Africans have been living in miserable conditions everywhere and suffering in their own countries as well as in foreign countries. Medina is very well aware of the fact that the people of her black race are suffering still in the present. She painfully says it to Atta: “Our race is still suffering today, in Africa, in America, in the Caribbean. One doesn’t remember the pain one is suffering: one lives it.” (ibid 210). Atta, an African-American lady, is also agrees to the fact that that people of her race have been suffering since centuries without committing any

offence. She argues that due to lack of unity among them, their suffering has not ended. Atta explains to Medina:

One doesn't forget centuries of suffering. My race remembers this suffering, my race hasn't forgotten it. I remember this suffering, this pain. Therefore I am. . . This is similar to dreams. There aren't any collective dreams. Each of us has his or her own dream, each of us suffers in his or her own way. And when some blacks are suffering, rest assured that others are doing well. You suffer because you are a human being, not because you are who you are, not because you are black. And if it were my own people making others suffer, I would suffer too. (ibid 211)

Farah's indicates that one's country's existence and welfare should be the top most priority and purpose of one's life. Farah, through the character of young sportswoman Sagal, suggests that all his fellow Somalis to be brave and put up a very strong fight against their own tortures and oppression in their own country. Somalia needs many more fearless and determined persons like Sagal who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the country. Sagal's ultimate goal is to somehow contribute in the emancipation of her fellow citizens from the clutches of oppressive dictator and their miserable life under the dictatorial regime. She tells about her future plan to her mother, Ebla:

"I don't want you to misunderstand me: I want to go down in history as contributing to a cause. I'll do all I can to make it a reality. If I don't win the competition, then I'll reconsider joining the clandestine movement. Yes, I'll tie the thread-end of my future to that of the country." (ibid 45)

Farah very skillfully shows the continuation of colonialism even after the independence through the relationship between Medina's grandfather and Sandra's grandfather and; between Medina and Sandra. There are instances of colonial and neocolonial consciousness in the novel. Local tribal chiefs always helped the foreign imperial powers to loot their country's resources and exploit their own people during the colonial period in Africa. Sandra's grandfather as a European coloniser came to Somalia to loot the Somali resources for prospering his motherland, Italy and capture natives for slave in disguise of civilising the Somalis and Medina's grandfather being a local chief cooperated with the Sandra's grandfather, the coloniser. Sandra expects the same cooperation and collaboration from Medina.

Farah has created a very strong and determined female as the protagonist of the novel. Medina is the leader of the revolutionary movement which works to overthrow the General's tyrannical regime in the country. She encourages fellow revolutionaries to be brave and ready to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of the nation and liberation of their fellow citizens from the evil clutches of the dictator. Like a true leader, she convincingly appeals her fellow revolutionaries to continue their resistance:

'We've tried. Koschin. Soyaan. Siciliano. You. And me. Now it's others' chance to try. Every revolutionary serves a cause greater than he or she. But wait, I'll be back. . . I don't see anything so exceptional about Samater losing

his job or face; or your mother a dignity which she didn't have in the first place; or Naseer and Dulman their, what you call, freedom. Others have lost their lives in this struggle against this fascist regime. Others have been imprisoned unjustly. Others have been tortured, humiliated and broken. As for my point: I say the struggle must continue.' (ibid 275, 281)

Farah shows that most of the people in the creative field in the country do not use their conscience and blindly follow orders of the General, they praise him, they endorse his sham and superficial socialist agenda and do whatever they are asked to do without thinking at all of what they are doing and what will the consequences on the lives of the common masses in the country. The General uses all means and all types of famous and important people like intellectuals and artists to maintain his good image in the nation and eventually, to maintain his autocratic rule in the country. He uses their popularity and reputation in the country to spread his superficial socialist agenda and removes them after use and reduces their importance completely.

Farah indicates that the life on the African continent in general and Somalia in specific is full of intricacies caused due to internal clashes, international intrigues and local mafia activities. Sandra, an Italian journalist in Somalia, continues the tradition of Macaulay by writing about Somali life without understanding it completely. Medina, a Somali journalist, criticises Sandra's neocolonial behaviour and her decision to write about Somalia. Every country has different political system, internal conflicts and social traditions and interconnectedness among them. It is very difficult for an outsider to understand and suggest solutions the problems arising out intertwining of these things. Any foreign theory or ideology proves inadequate to local problems. Hence, Farah suggests that it is inappropriate to apply any foreign system of polity like socialism and economy like Marxism in Africa and in Somalia.

Conclusion:

The local governments and their leaders in the developing countries are very insensitive and irresponsible. They use the adversities and sufferings of their citizens for their economic and political benefits. They manipulate and misuse foreign donations and funds given to help and comfort the suffering poor people in their respective countries. They use such aids given in crisis situations for their own economic and political benefits.

Colonial and neocolonial consciousness is clearly evident in the novel. The former colonisers and richer countries try to dominate and oppress resources of weaker and poorer sovereign nations and territories. They use various subtle strategies to achieve their aims and justify their ill motives every time. They always make these sovereign countries depend on them for everything these nations need.

Farah suggests that all the intellectuals in the country must be proactive and brave. They must use their knowledge of modern technology to unite all the people in order to put up a very strong resistance against all the threats, damage and loss to their country caused by internal as well as foreign dominating forces. They should work fearlessly like active social workers and must use their knowledge for social service. They must take the responsibility of liberating the country and their fellow citizens from the clutches of tyranny and slavery.



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