

REFLECTIONS OF VICTORS AND VICTIMS 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 Reflections of victors of victors and victims in John Masters' novel *Night Runners of Bengal*.

Key words:

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

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 companied 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 in known for his historical novels set in India. His works are associated with British Empire in India. John Masters' 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 was an officer in a Bengal native infantry Regiment. Captain Rodney had bitter experiences about the British rudeness and hauteur. In this novel John Masters provided the 'terror' and tragedy of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. It was all about "The Sepoy Rebellion". John Masters focused the Socio-Cultural perspectives in this novel. He also represented the historical events in mythical, stereotypical and racist fashion.

Rodney Savage was the captain of the 13th rifles Bengal native infantry. Rodney married Joanna. They lived in Bhowani. The native sepoys were forced to follow certain rules and regulations. But the native sepoys 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. Later native sepoys were forced to give up their violence. The British East Indian company made the native people becomes marginalized class.

The research paper examines Reflections of victors of victors and victims in John Masters' novel *Night Runners of Bengal*. It attempts to study the socio-cultural perspectives and dominant culture in society. It also examines the victors' knowledge upon the victims.

The ruling classes spread the dominating ideology through the word, the act, the thinking. The ruling class will show their power in word, action, and thinking upon the victims. The ruling classes have always considered themselves superior. They treated other people in a lowly way and did not see them as humans. The British saw the Indian people as disgraceful. The British do not like the culture, customs and civilization of the Indian people. John Masters has shown the dominance of the ruling class in these lines

She said, "I don't understand." "There are many things you do not understand." An English girl had no business to involve herself with gurus and fakirs and the edges of magic. Besides, he had lost his nerve and she must have noticed it. He spoke curtly, and meant to be rude, but she showed no anger. (*Night Runners of Bengal*, 16)

The British ruling class showed that they were dominant in the style of clothing, speaking, behaving and so on. In the novel John Masters explores the custom of Indian people in English. The ruling class used their own identities, and the social system convinced them to be superior and others inferiors. In this novel, the English girl speaks to the Indian people is degrading that English people as inferiors races to Indians.

He did not want to remind himself of the crows(Indians)...A rather weird thing happened on my way back ...” He told her and went on, his own mind ensnared again now that he had to try to make someone else see the reality of it ...Did you say Miss Langford wasn't wearing gloves, or a cloak, or a veil?” “Eh? No—yes—I mean she wasn't. I asked what you thought about the Silver Guru and the crows... That young lady must be spoken to. I'm surprised Lady Isobel hasn't done it already. She must not be allowed to let us all down in front of the blacks.”(19)

The ruling classes are the community who lived in the labor others. People who are luxurious without working can be the ruling class people in the society. The ruling classes followed the dominating ideology of the slavery of others. The British followed the caste system and racism in India. The British became the ruling class and treated the Indian people as slaves. John Masters has given the right points about victors and victims in the novel.

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——” “Don't blaspheme, please. I'm sorry. But I think you're too sensitive about it. (19-20)

The British came to India in the pursuit of trade, but later became the masters of the Indian people. The ordinary British came to dominate India. The British simply conquered India and treated them as slaves. John Masters has historically viewed the British as victors and Indians as victims in this 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)

These lines are about the British as called victors in this novel. John Masters shares his experiences in these lines “I’ll tell you why I must find out. After these six months at Kishanpur, living in a state, I have decided that we English only inhabit the surface of India”(28)

The British are dwarf foxes. But they will act like a sheep in the society. The ruling classes were determined not to learn the culture and customs of oppressed people. Similarly, the British were determined not to learn the culture and customs of the Indian people. John Masters has commented on its ideology.

Miss Langford, they do their best. We all do. But to feel India in the way you say your Kishanpur friends do, you must become Indian, gain one set of qualities and lose another. As a race we don’t do it—we can’t. Women, now—English ladies have to be careful. Indian customs are very different from ours, and we do not want any misunderstandings to spoil things.” He avoided her eyes. (30)

The ruling classes treated the victims as dogs in the society. The slaves were a loyal and grateful as dogs to the ruling class. John Masters has recorded these comments in this novel.

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)

The ruling class will never force the slave people to act against them. The ruling class provided the need for building a slave society and paying attention to it. The ruling class will never let other people oppose them. The ruling class will never let the slaves join together for the riot against the ruling classes. These lines indicate that how the English government is preventing the Indian people from joining together against victors.

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)

The English Government brought Indian rulers under their control and treated them as caged pets. The awkward acts and the cunning acts of the English state were ruled India in the plunder of other people's lands. The British allowed to trade from the Mughal King. Later the Mughal emperors were as caged pets of the British the empire. Mughal emperors were defeated. In this historic event, John Masters has demonstrated the victors and victims in the novel.

A Rawan had built it on the site of a smaller house, in the sixteenth-century morning of the Mogul glory. The plan of the entry port showed the hand of a French engineer, and Prithvi Chand had confirmed that another Rawan had commissioned a student of Vauban’s to modernize the fort in 1710. Mahrattas, Rajputs, and Moguls had captured and recaptured it, and at last the British. For five hundred years the Rawans had ruled their lands

from here. Their hold had been now tenuous, now firm, but they had never altogether relaxed their grip, whether as independent kings, as viceroys for the Mogul, as vassals of the Mahrattas, as caged pets of the British. The fort lived on with them. (66)

Until the British became powerful victors in India, they still stopped Indian kings to gathering of other princes. The British were able to easily subdue India because of the cynical policy of separatism.. John Masters described this tricky act

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 ruling class has built up social organizations with their selfish intelligence. The British constructed Indian society with various opinions of victors of society in India. The social structures of the ruling class make all the people as slaves before them. Similarly, the British has enslaved the Indian state in India.

The company was too big to know everything, and too powerful to relish having the fact underlined by one of its own servants. 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)

Here John Masters describes how the British made the Indian rulers to bow down. This is an excellent example of John Masters, reflected victors and victims.

In one motion she flowed off the cushions and knelt in front of him. He looked down on her bowed head, where a line of red lead marked the parting of her hair; she smelt of sandalwood and jasmine water. She brought her palms together in front of her face and moved them up to her forehead and down again in the gesture called namaste. Reaching out, she touched his right knee and foot in turn with her right hand, supporting her right elbow with her left hand as she did it. These were the signs that acknowledged over lordship, and Rodney's eyes .(97)

John Masters has also described the victors and victims through out of this novel. The English has never been different from their policies. The English were dominant fanatics in their colonized lands. The British have destroyed India in the name of civilization and orientalism. John Masters has written in the eyes of the victors and the victims' eyes in the novel.

There are not two standards for us, for the English—only one. We must keep our standard, or go home. We must not, as we do now, permit untouchability and forbid suttee, abolish tyranny in one state and leave it in another, have our right hand Eastern and our left hand Western. It is not that India is wicked; she has her own ways. If we rule we must rule as Indians—or we must make the Indians English. But we do neither; we are like Mr. Dellamain. We have one foot in a whirlpool. Sometimes I am sure we will be dragged into another and drowned. God will punish us for compro mising. As He will punish me.(184-185)

John Masters has given all historic perspectives to the Indians as the victims and the British as victors in this novel *Nightrunners of Bengal*. It reflected the victors and victims. In the history of John Masters has made it clear and simple about victors' Culture, History and Custom. John Masters' novel describes the victors and victims as a science thought in this novel.

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