

Michael Crichton's Prey - An Imperialistic Exploration: Technology, Environment and Sustainability of Lives

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Abstract: The present world scenario's emerging innovative inventions and discoveries struggle to harmonise with nature and the environment. The eminence of nature over human thoughts and their reflections paved the way for ecocriticism's advent. Postcolonialism can be preserved as a study of theory and literature that exhibits coloniser-colonised experience. The colonialism tendency and its association with the consciousness of the environment paved the way for the ecological imperialism mode. Rather than political and cultural tyranny, the colonisation process can be regarded as environmental terrorism. Ecological imperialism, or the more condensed term eco-imperialism, can be viewed as the contempt of colonists towards the environment. They are conquering by upsetting the natural balance of the established ecological system. In the present scenario, one can experience the similar mentality of imperialists who are ready to exploit the resources and destroy nature under the pretext of expansion. The eco-imperialism threat to the world exists in the form of advanced inventions like bioweapons and other nuclear hazards. In contrast, the artificial synthesis of life becomes the primary key in the novel entitled Prey by Michael Crichton, a cautionary tale about the up-gradation of scientific and technological fields like genetic engineering and nanotechnology. Prey succeeds in its effort to expose the emerging conditions of ecological imperialism and neo-colonialism related to technological advancement and inventions. The present paper attempts to analyse the traces of eco imperialism in the science fictional work Prey.

Keywords: *Postcolonialism, Technology, Eco-imperialism, Science fiction*

The undying quest for completion made human beings launch the amicable relationship between technology and ecology. The advancement of technology and its ultimatum redirected man to treat his life as the supreme one. From time immemorial, innovative explorations and scientific inventions have been part of civilisation, leading to the conquest of culture over nature. Later on, it paved the way for imperialistic expeditions to different parts of the world. In the current global scenario, the expectance of the newer mode of technologies and the defence of ecology became the chief apprehension for survival and sustainability. The innovative thoughts of humans blended with the evolution of technology paved the way for the emergence of Science fiction genres in literature, where the quest of man to unravel the mysteries of the universe attracted him to this genre. Science fiction tends to explore the possible consequences of scientific technology over natural habitat. Science fiction deals with the imagination of futuristic settings associated with science and technology, space travel, time travel, parallel universes and extraterrestrial life.

Adam Robert, in his seminal work Science Fiction, pointed out the definition of Gwyneth Jones about the genre of science fiction:

'Science' in science fiction has always had a tacit meaning other than commonly accepted. It had nothing, in particular, to say about the subject matter, which may be just about anything so long as the formal conventions of future dress are observed. It means only, finally, that whatever phenomenon or speculation is treated in the fiction, there is a claim that it's going to be studied to some extent scientifically- that is, objectively and rigorously; in a controlled environment. The writer's business is to set up the equipment in a laboratory of the mind such that the 'what if' in question is at once isolated and provided with the exact nutrients it needs (9-10).

As Robert states, it describes the 'what if' phenomenon through Jones, who treated science fiction as a "form of thought experiment" (10). The imaginative use of thought experiments had led to a new move in the science fictional world. The creative energy of science fiction had its readiness to confront serious issues and threats that experts sideline. A similar inclination can be witnessed in the science fictional works of Michael Crichton. The creation of 'fear' as a tool by the power authority pointed out the unequal power relations in the world scenario. Such situations are closely associated with conceptual conditions like neo-colonialism and ecological imperialism. The science fictional novels of Michael Crichton pact with the theme of fear due to its great significance of technological advances and innovative imperialism.

Essential changes are already happening through the encroachment of technology in the World setup. The literary world perceived the shift of theories in the field of literature. The postmodern school of thought paved the way for new theories that understand power relations, namely postcolonialism and ecocriticism in terms of nature. The intellectual discourse of postcolonialism deals with the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised and the cultural legacies associated with it. While ecocriticism focuses on literary scholars who "analyse texts that exemplify environmental anxieties and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature," stated Wikipedia.org. As the interdisciplinary field, ecocriticism also gives prime importance to postcolonial theory. Postcolonialism questions and reinvents the cultural perception regarding the human relation of colonial nations and exploitations as a contemporary genre. McKinley states that postcolonialism can be treated as the critical lens provided to the reader "to analyse and explain the effects that colonisation and imperialism, or the extension of power into other nations, have on people and nations." (9)

In the foundational text of Postcolonial theory, Orientalism, Edward W Said discusses the artificial boundaries existing between East and West. If one closely scrutinises the condition of one nation under the power of technology, an artificial boundary is set between the powerful, namely

superior agencies like MNC and the powerless, the ordinary citizens of the nation. In the science fictional works of Michael Crichton, such conditions of artificial boundaries exist between ecology and technology. Prey's novel deals with the artificial boundary set by scientific technology between Nanoswarms and ordinary human beings. Edward W Said writes:

The orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the occidental itself is not just there either...The relationship between occident and orient is a relationship of power, domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony...The orient was orientalisised not only because it was discovered to be "oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European but also because it could be - that is, submitted to being-made oriental (5-6).

Edward Said stated in *Orientalism* about the myth of artificial boundary that is pertinent in the contemporary scenario of developed and developing ones. Every nation has its own identity, whether in ecology or technology. The difference made based on highly technological innovations stands parallel to this myth. The varying degrees of complex hegemony exist between the developed and developing nations and are related to the authoritative power and familiar person.

As the postcolonial era writer, Michael Crichton tried to analyse this difference in technology in his science fictional works. Legitimately, Crichton succeeded in linking his imagination with technological inventions to create futuristic settings in novels like *Prey*. Prey's science fiction novel focuses on the threat of artificial synthesis of life. Such Science Fiction novels can portray the emerging condition of neo-colonialism and ecological imperialism by dealing with the crisis accompanying technological advancement. Surrounded by the destructive element of fear, the protagonist characters, the true embodiment of the colonised, are capable enough to develop the tendency to protest against the interchanging circumstance.

Prey, published in 2002, pacts with the theme of artificial synthesis of life. It is a cautionary tale about the up-gradation of scientific and technological fields like genetic engineering and nanotechnology. The artificial Nanoswarms created by Xymos Nanorobotix Company act as a menace to the natural habitat; programmed with artificial intelligence, Nanoswarms are under way to treat humans as their Prey. In this predator-Prey relation, one can eyewitness the authority making capability of Nanoswarms. The escaped Nanoswarms from the laboratory established their territory on the safer side of the desert. Nanoswarms even use the method of creating imitations of deceased persons to outspread their territory by confronting the native living beings. The enlargement of territory by different means of conquest is related to the colonisers' tendency, as stated by Macaulay's "Minutes" and its impact on India. Thomas Babington Macaulay clearly stated in his "Minutes": "we must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, and English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect". The plan of Nanoswarms to create replicas of the deceased scientists had a definite aim similar to Macaulay's "Minutes." Nanoswarms was annoyed to hire this system as a means of invasion parallel to colonialism.

In *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (1964), Herbert Marshall McLuhan created the phrase "the medium

is the message." He described that a medium distresses the society that shows a role not by the message conveyed over the medium but by the characteristics of the medium. He even quoted the example of a light bulb by stating that "a light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence." In the novel *Prey*, the presence of Nanoswarms outside the laboratory creates the message of terror and confusion in the minds of scientists. This note of fear is the direct result of the presence of technology. As the disequilibrium exists between technology and human society, one can treat it as the advent of neo-colonialism rather than imperialism.

Postcolonial literature has been "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day" (Ashcroft et al., 2). As a process, colonialism stood as a means of claiming and exploiting foreign lands, resources, and people. The severe threat caused to the ecology of colonies paved the way for the new mode of ideology, namely, Ecological Imperialism. The European settlers were successful science-fictional in colonisation due to introducing animals, plants and diseases to the new territories. Paul Dreissen coins the term 'eco-imperialism'. In the 1986 book *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe: 900-1900*, Alfred Crosby proposes colonisation as a method of environmental terrorism relatively than political and cultural dictatorship. Alfred Crosby states,

There is a striking paradox here. The parts of the world that today in terms of population and culture, are most like Europe are far away from Europe- indeed, they are across major oceans... The resolution of the paradox is simple to state, though difficult to explain... Perhaps European humans have triumphed because of their superiority in arms, organisation, and fanaticism, but what in heaven's name is why the sun never sets on the empire of the dandelion? Perhaps the success of European Imperialism has a biological and ecological component (7).

Crosby deliberates the situation of European Imperialism as the aftereffect of Ecological Imperialism. The danger of eco-imperialism still exists in the present world in the form of advanced inventions and their reverberation. No one can ignore the interconnectedness between works of literature and ecology and technology as these factors are related to humans. The smidgens of eco imperialism, a mode of neo-colonialism, can be seen in the science fictional novel, *Prey*. The manner of centrality as the top reason for oppression can be seen in the novel *Prey*. The central character of the novel, Jack Forman, states:

And she had trouble grasping the sheer power of self-organised behaviour within a massive population of dumb animals. In any case, this was a profound human prejudice. Human beings are expected to find a central command in any organisation. States had governments.

Corporations had CEOs; Schools had principals- Armies had generals. Human beings tended to believe that without central command, chaos would overwhelm the organisation, and nothing significant could be accomplished. From this standpoint, it was difficult to believe that extremely stupid creatures with brains smaller than pinheads were capable of construction projects more complicated than any human object. But they were... (395)

The Nanoswarms without central control emerged to be more powerful than that of human beings in the novel *Prey*. Being a computer analyst, Jack succeeds in his effort to find the real cause behind the attack on Nanoswarms. They were encoded particles, but they started re-programming by ensuing thermite relation moderately than the source of centrality. Xymos Nanorobotics Company was required to establish their authority overworld with the revolutionary finding of Nanoswarms. With the reversal of the situation, Nanoswarms became the new authority with vulturine behaviour. The interchanging characters of the coloniser and the colonised become the focal point. In the latter part, the symbiotic version of Nanobots becomes the new coloniser who slowly devours and takes over their hosts to produce more Nanobots, allowing them to move and taint others.

Xymos Company suited the invader by constructing the lab and disturbing the ecological system. As the story reveals, Nanoswarms assume the role of eco imperialist by forming a new habitat near-desert the cave. It leads to further problems in the natural balance of the established ecosystem. Crichton commented in the introduction of *Prey*:

Anyone who is willing to argue, for example, that the industrial policy of clear-cutting forests is more damaging than the ecological policy of fire suppression ignores the fact that both policies have been carried out with utter conviction and both have altered the virgin forest irrevocably. Both provide ample evidence of the obstinate egotism that is a hallmark of interaction with the environment. (2)

A similar situation emerged in the novel as both the Xymos nanorobotics company and Nanoswarms had caused the same threat to the environment. This tendency can be defined as the contempt of colonists towards the environment. Michael Crichton vividly revealed the impact of modern technology on the world's ecological system through his novel *State of Fear and Prey*. Crichton says, "The total system we call the biosphere is so complicated that we cannot know in advance the consequences of anything we do" (12). It is essential not to merge the innovations in technology with the imperialists, resulting in other dangers. "There is always cause of fear. The cause may change over time, but the fear remains the same" (13). In this advanced period of technology, neo-colonialism and ecological imperialism exist alongside the rationality of science and are still under the threat of politics of power. The thought-provoking subject matters dealt with in *Prey* and *State of Fear* made the familiar readers explore the relationship between ecology and technology.

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