

**Technology, Environment and Sustainability of Lives: An Imperialistic
Exploration of Prey by Michael Crichton
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Abstract

The present world scenario, on the verge of innovative inventions and discoveries, struggles hard to establish harmony with the nature and environment. The prominence of nature over human thoughts and their reflections paved way for the advent of Ecocriticism. Postcolonialism can be treated as a study of theory and literature that exhibits coloniser-colonised experience. The tendency of colonialism and its association with consciousness for environment paved way for the mode of ecological imperialism. Rather than the political and cultural tyranny the process of colonisation can be regarded as a form of environmental terrorism. Ecological imperialism or more shortened term eco-imperialism can be regarded as the disregard of colonists towards the environment. They are invading by upsetting the natural balance of the established ecological system. On the present scenario, one can experience the similar mentality of imperialists who are ready to exploit the resources and destruct the nature under the pretext of development. The threat of eco imperialism exists in the world in the form of advanced inventions like bioweapons and other nuclear hazards. The artificial synthesis of life becomes the major key in the novel entitled Prey by Michael Crichton. It is a cautionary tale about the upgradation of scientific and technological fields like genetic engineering and nanotechnology. Prey succeeds in its effort to portray the emerging conditions of ecological imperialism and neo-colonialism related with the technological advancement and inventions. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the traces of eco imperialism in the science fictional work Prey.

Key words: , Postcolonialism, Technology, Eco-imperialism, Science fiction

The everlasting quest for completion made human beings to establish the cordial relation between technology and ecology. The evolution of technology and its ultimatum redirected man to treat his life as the most supreme one. From the time immemorial, innovative explorations and scientific inventions are part of civilization, and this in turn led to the conquest of culture over nature. Later on, it paved way for the imperialistic expeditions on different parts of the world. On the current global scenario, the expectance of newer mode of technologies and the protection of ecology became the chief concern for survival and sustainability

The innovative thoughts of human blended with evolution of technology paved way for the emergence of Science fiction genres. The quest of man to unravel the mysteries of universe made him to get attracted with this genre. Science fiction has the tendency of exploring 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 extra-terrestrial life.

Adam Roberts, on 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 that 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 business of the writer is to setup

the equipment in a laboratory of the mind such that 'what if' in question is at once isolated and provided with the exact nutrients it needs. (9-10)

By describing the phenomenon of 'what if' Jones treated SF as a “form of thought experiment” (Roberts 10). The imaginative use of thought experiment had led a new move in science fictional world. The creative energy of Science fiction had its readiness to confront serious issues and threats that are sidelined by experts. Similar tendency can be witnessed in the science fictional works of Michael Crichton. The making of 'fear' a tool by the power authority pointed out the unequal power relations in the world scenario. Such situations are closely associated with the conceptual conditions like neo-colonialism and ecological imperialism. The science fictional novels of Michael Crichton deals with the theme of fear due to unexpected consequences of technological innovations and new imperialism.

With the advancement of technology, the ultimate changes are already happening in the World scenario. The literary world witnessed the shift of theories in the field of literature. The postmodern school of thought paved way for the emergence of new theories that understands power relations, namely post colonialism, and eco criticism in terms of nature. The intellectual discourse of post colonialism deals with the relation of the colonizer and the colonized, and the cultural legacies associated with it. While as Ecocriticism focuses on literary scholars who "analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature" (Wikipedia.org). As the interdisciplinary field, Eco criticism gives prime importance to postcolonial theory as well. Postcolonialism, as a contemporary genre, questions and reinvents the cultural perception regarding the human relation of colonial nations and exploitations. Post colonialism can be treated as the critical lens provided to the reader "to analyze and explain the effects that colonization and imperialism, or the extension of power into other nations, have on people and nations” (Mckinley 9).

On the foundational text of Postcolonial theory, Orientalism, Edward W Said discusses, about the artificial boundaries existing between East and West. If one closely examines the condition of one nation under power of technology, artificial boundary is set between the powerful, namely superior agencies like MNC's and the powerless, the normal citizens of nation. In the science fictional works of Michael Crichton, such conditions of artificial boundaries are existing between ecology and Technology. The novel Prey deals with the artificial boundary set by scientific technology between Nano swarms and normal 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, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony... The orient was orientalized 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 clearly applicable in the present scenario of developed and developing ones. Every nation has their own identity, whether it's in terms of ecology and technology. The difference made on the basis of highly technological innovations stand parallel to this myth. The varying degrees of complex hegemony not only exist between the developed and developing nations but also are related with the authoritative power and common man.

Michael Crichton, as the postcolonial era writer, tried to analyze this difference in terms of technology on his science fictional works. Through the sense of authenticity, Crichton succeeded in his effort to link his imagination with the technological inventions for the creation of futuristic settings in novel like Prey. SF novel Prey focuses on the threat of artificial synthesis of life. Such SF novels are able to portray the emerging condition of neo-colonialism as well as ecological imperialism by dealing with the crisis associated with technological advancement. Within the destructive element of fear, the protagonist characters, the true embodiment of the colonized, are capable enough to develop the tendency of protest for the interchanging condition.

Prey, published in 2002, deals 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 acts as a menace over the natural habitat. Programmed with artificial intelligence, Nanoswarms started to treat humans as their prey. In this predator-prey relation, one can witness the authority making capability of Nano swarms. The escaped Nano swarms from the laboratory established their own territory on the safer side of the desert. Nano swarms even use the technique of creating replicas of deceased persons to extend their territory by attacking the native living beings. The expansion of territory by different means of conquest is related with the tendency of the colonizers. One may not be able to forget about Macaulay's 'Minutes' and its impact on India. Thomas Babington Macaulay clearly stated in his Minute: "we must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and color, and English in taste, opinions, in morals and in intellect". The plan of Nano swarms to create replicas of the deceased scientists had a definite target similar to the point of view of Macaulay's 'Minutes'. Nanoswarms tried to employ this method as a means of conquest parallel to colonialism.

On Understanding Media: The Extension of Man, published in 1964, Herbert Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase "the medium is the message". He explained that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role not by the content delivered over the medium, but by the characteristics of medium itself. He even cited the example of a light bulb by stating that, "a light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence" (web). On the context of the novel Prey, the presence of Nanoswarms outside the laboratory had created the message of terror and confusion on the minds of scientists. This message of fear is the direct result of the presence of technology. As the disequilibrium is existing between the technology and human society, one can treat it as the advent of neo-colonialism rather than the imperialism.

Postcolonial Literature has been "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization 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 serious threat caused in the ecology of colonies paved way for the new mode of ideology namely, Ecological Imperialism. The European settlers were successful in colonization due to their introduction of animals, plants and disease to the new territories. The term 'eco-imperialism' is coined by Paul Dreissen. In 1986 book, Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe: 900-1900, Alfred Crosby proposes colonization as a process of environmental terrorism rather than the political and cultural tyranny. 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 paradox is simple to state, though difficult to explain... Perhaps European humans have triumphed because of their superiority in arms, organization, and fanaticism, but what in heaven's name is the reason that the sun never sets on the empire of the dandelion? Perhaps the success of European Imperialism has a biological and ecological component. (7)

Crosby considers the situation of European Imperialism as the after effect of Ecological Imperialism. The threat of eco-imperialism still exists in the present world in the form of advanced inventions and its aftermath. At this point, one cannot ignore the interconnectedness between literatures, and ecology and technology as these factors are associated with humans. The traces of eco imperialism, a mode of neo-colonialism can be seen in science fictional novel Prey.

The mode of centrality as the chief cause of oppression can be seen in the novel Prey. The protagonist of the novel Jack Forman states:

....And she had a trouble grasping the sheer power of self-organized behaviour within a very large population of dumb animals. In any case, this was a deep human prejudice. Human beings expected to find a central command in any organization. States had governments. Corporations had CEO's, Schools had principals- Armies had generals. Human beings tended to believe that without central command, chaos would overwhelm the organization 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 infact they were..... (395)

The Nanoswarms without the central control emerged to be more powerful than that of human beings in the novel Prey. Jack, being a computer analyst, succeeds in his effort to find the real cause behind the attack of Nanoswarms. They were programmed particles but they started re-programming by following termite relation rather than the cause of centrality. Xymos Nanorobotics Company wanted to establish their authority over world with the revolutionary finding of Nanoswarms. By the reversal of situation, Nano swarms became the new authority with predatory behaviour. The interchanging roles of the coloniser and the colonised become the focal point. On the latter part, symbiotic version of Nanobots becomes the new colonizer who slowly devour and take over their hosts to produce more Nanobots, while allowing them to move and contaminate others.

Xymos Company became the invader by constructing the lab, and thereby disturbing ecological system. As the story unfolds, Nanoswarms assumes the role of eco imperialist by forming the new habitat near desert cave. This led to further problems in the natural balance of the established eco-system. As Crichton remarked in the introduction of the novel 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)

The similar situation emerged on the novel as both the Xymos nanorobotics company and Nano swarms had caused the same threat to environment. This tendency can be defined as the disregard of colonists towards the environment.

Michael Crichton vividly portrayed the impact of modern technology over the ecological system of world through his novel's 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 that may result in other dangers. "There is always cause of fear. The cause may change over time but the fear remains the same" (13). On this advanced period of technology, neo-colonialism and ecological imperialism exist

alongside the rationality of science and is still under the threat of politics of power. The thought provoking subject matters dealt in Prey and State of Fear made the common readers to explore the relation between ecology and technology.

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