

Imperialization of Female Body through Sexual Encroachment: An Analysis of Arnold Itwaru's *Shanti*

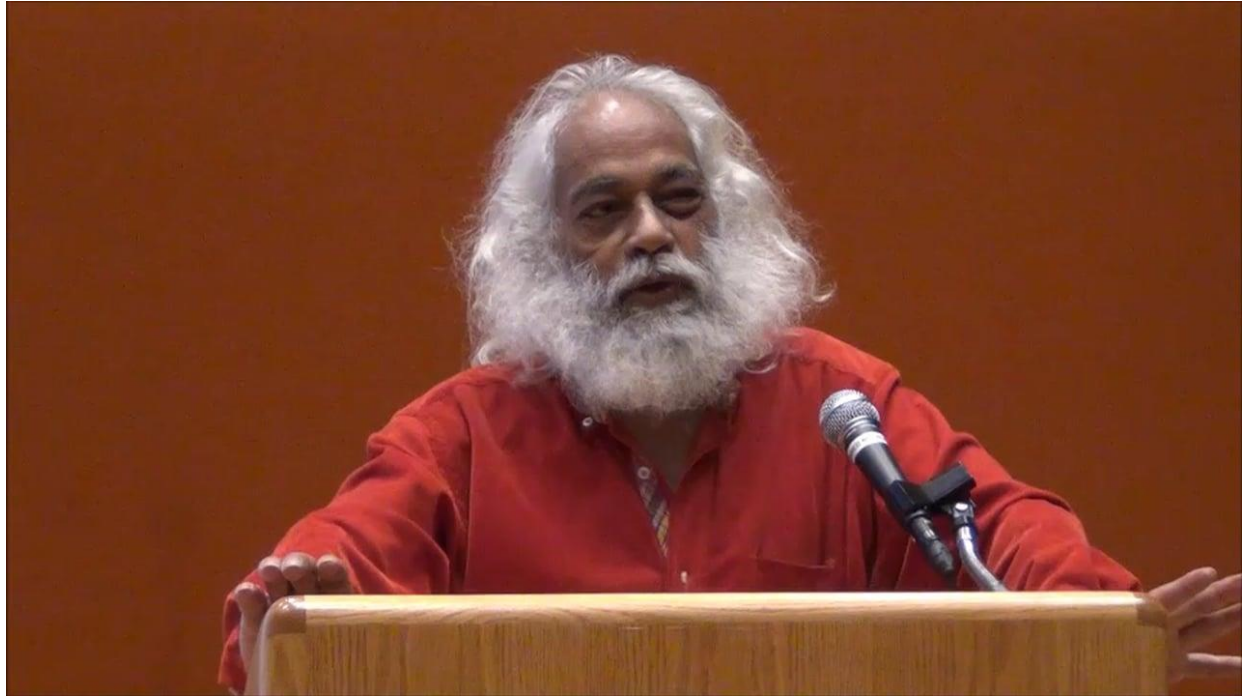
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Abstract

The politics of marginalization and the colonial hegemony are the central concerns of Arnold Itwaru's works. *Shanti* goes back to the world of colonial Guyana and traces the exploitation of the indentured workers on the plantation, where the majority of the population are the descendants of the people of India who came there to work in the sugar plantations. The novel is more about the eponymous heroine Shanti than about any other characters. It depicts the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy and how Shanti, the subaltern, has been a victim of it. The novel exposes brutal rapes and sexual atrocities victimized by the majority of the girls of the plantation from the colonizers as well as their own people. Here, rape cannot be read as mere a physical violence against females rather it is the enactment of power and domination. This paper tries to explore and analyze how rape or sexual act becomes in the novel as the strategy of dominating and subordinating the female body. Exploring the theoretical frame works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Laura Mulevy, the study delineates how power is translated through sexual act and rape.

Key Words: Arnold Itwaru, *Shanti*, marginalization, power, domination, identity, female body, victimized



Arnold Itwaru

Courtesy: <https://vimeo.com/190584341>

Politics of Marginalization and Colonial Hegemony

The politics of marginalization and the colonial hegemony are the central concerns of Arnold Itwaru's works. *Shanti* goes back to the world of colonial Guyana and traces the exploitation of the indentured workers on the plantation, where the majority of the population are the descendants of the people of India who came there to work in the sugar plantations. The novel is more about the eponymous heroine Shanti than about any other characters. Her very name Shanti is ironic in the sense that a daughter of peace became a daughter of shame. "But for Shanti, named after and within the Om, indivisible syllable of the self in tranquility, the speech of peace, Shanti, peace, daughter of peace—there was shame" (1988: 4). Both her men and colonizers equally stare at her with lusty eyes. Almost all the young girls of the plantation are the victims of colonizers sexual harassment. The study delineates how power is translated through sexual act and rape.

Masculine Phallic Desire

Masculine phallic desire purposefully mystifies the female body as something to be explored and analyzed for quenching the curiosity. The masculine desire converts the body by transforming and translating it into the "segments of a puzzle, riddle or enigma" (1966: 54). Thus, the female body becomes an object for masculine curiosity and exploration, an object for fetishism. The novel recodes typical instances, "The men would stare in open lust at her exposed thighs, her back, her buttocks, her belly, wherever the torn fabric of her tatters exposed her

innocent and personal flesh” (1988: 4). As a result the body does not want to be overlooked but to be conquered by phallic penetration to the inner most labyrinths of the body. Thus, Nicholas Groth states in his *Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender*:

It is an effort to counteract feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy in himself and to assert his strength and power – to control and exploit. Sexuality is not the only-nor the primary- motives underlying rape. It is however, the means through which conflicts surrounding issues of anger and power become discharged. Rape is always a combination of anger, power and sexuality. (1979:60)

The colonizer very often expresses his power by seducing females, here sexual acts nothing but the enactment of power and domination. In order to perpetuate power over the females, there is no appropriate method other than transforming them as “docile bodies” (1977:136) through the sexual encroachment to their body. Loyd. T. Booker, the loathsome overseer was a typical colonial figure and his ways typified how some of the colonialists directly raped and harassed the girls. He was always on the lookout of female bodies and his lusty eyes found them “fuckable female animals at his disposal and pleasure” (1988:15). Thus, the novel depicts:

The pleasure of power charged through him. Stop whimpering, you fuckable bitch! You won’t die. It’ll do you good to have a white man. You should be happy! He noticed with growing curiosity the vulnerable deep pink through which his rejected discharge was seeping out. Goodness, he thought, these Indian bitches have pink cunts too! And he attacked Gladys again (1988:16)

The power seeps out from the colonizer’s phallus to the colonized female body which enables to conquer the female body as colony. The irresistible impulse of power energized Booker to rape the victim several times. Here, rape cannot be read as mere a physical violence against females rather it is the enactment of power and domination. There are many instances perceptible in the novel:

He followed the young woman into canes when she went to urinate unseen by the others. He pounced, his superior strength quickly over powering her, pinning her under, smothering her shock, her rage, her sobs, her humiliation as he raped her in his empire urgency (1988:15)

Raped Women

Women who have been raped in most instances are filled with feelings of shame and many have a bad self-esteem, furthermore, anxiety, sadness and guilt are also very common feelings. When women should be extremely angry and feeling hatred towards the offender they both are feeling ashamed and guilty. It is perceptible in *Shanti*, “she corrected, covering her face in shame. Booker stood tall and proud and manly. (1988:15) This sounds strange, but the reason could be that some women do not have a high self-esteem and thus put the blame on themselves instead of the offender.

Women are expected to assume a subordinate relationship to men. Consequently, rape can be seen as a logical extension of the typical interactions between women and men. Mr. Booker was an impatient, fierce, arrogant man, a proud representative of Great Britain and symbol of

magnificent power. Here, female bodies are colonies to be conquered and subordinated and sexual penetration is nothing but the encroachment of power to the colony. Thus, *Shanti* represent this predicament:

Shanti stiffened at the touch of Mr. Booker's hand on her hair. She tried to push him off but her tearful resistance was of no use. his powerful hands drove up her skirt, her panties, her tender personal flesh, pinned her on the ground in colonizing force and violations the fire devoured her screams and horror ... and assault of Mr. Booker's conquering empire lust. (1988:8)

It comprises all sexual violence where somebody penetrates another human being or tries to, and in that fashion completely breaks this person's say in that matter. There are to be found attitudes such as competitiveness, relentlessness, good staying power, efficiency, effective virtues

Lacanian Psychoanalysis

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, phallus stands for power and domination. Phallus is associated with men, so men are privileged to dominate the female. In the novel the murder of the colonialist Booker by castration is very symbolic and suggestive, here, cutting the penis symbolizes capturing his power of subordination. Thus, the novel describes his murder as, "Booker's khaki pants had been pulled down and his penis was cut off" (1988: 21). His power associated with his phallus by which he brutally raped many females, by removing his penis he became powerless that is equal to his death. Thus, phallus is a static image of completeness and power.

Power Imbalance

The high incidence of rape in the novel is a result of the power imbalance between men and women. The novel depicts the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy and how Shanti, the subaltern, has been a victim of it. The novel exposes brutal rapes and sexual atrocities committed against girls of the plantation from the colonizers as well as their own people. Here, rape is cannot be read as mere a physical violence against females rather it is the enactment of power and domination.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: *Indian Writing in English: A Subaltern Perspective*

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