

The indigenous people in shooting an elephant

Literature



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The indigenous people in Shooting an Elephant

George Orwell transfers a real time experience through words. Apart from shooting an elephant, this essay seems to focus more on the struggle that goes in the mind of a white man, who lives among the indigenous people of Burma. But the difference is that Orwell does not reflect any claim of imperialism which other British men had, in fact he had a soft corner for the Burmese coolies. In his inner mind he seemed to support Burmese. This could be understood from his words "Theoretically - and secretly, of course - I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British"

[Orwell, George, 1936]

When he says "when the white man turns tyrant, it is his own freedom that he destroys" he means to say a lot. First thing is that the impression Burmese have on British people. He meets a situation where his mind stops him from shooting the elephant, but the circumstances force him to shoot, in this ambiguous situation he feels that he had to react according to the wish of the majority, and win the good books of the Burmese people. The treatment which he and the other European people in Burma were receiving taunts his conscience on one side, and he analyses the reason to be the effect of imperialistic rule of the British and the harassment that they done to Burmese people.

That is why he says "I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress..... In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my

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nerves" [Orwell, George, 1936].

When that incident happened where he was expected to shoot an elephant that entered into the town, he really felt his importance among the native people. It was a better opportunity for him to be accepted by the people. But the irony is that he actually does not have the intention to kill the elephant. The crowd that followed him seem to increase in number as time went on, this made him to think of what might happen if he acts according to his mind. In such a critical situation he feels a bit ambiguous, either to wait for the elephant to slow down its fierce, or to do what the indigenous crowd expect him to do?.

Men while he also thinks of another situation where if he turns or reacts in the opposite direction he would be losing his freedom among the natives. He refers himself to be the white man, and says that he would have to lose all the features which the native had created for British people. In such a case he will be considered as a hollow one. It will be better to use his own words, he says " To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing - no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at" [Orwell, George. 1936]

On the whole Orwell's reaction in shooting an elephant is out of the forced circumstances lead by the native people, but he had no original intention to shoot it. On the other hand he would like to gain the impression of the native people. The series of insults faced by him in the working place, the treatment which the Burmese give for white people and Europeans, and at finally though he seem to develop a supporting attitude towards Burmese thoughts

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against white men, he did not want to lose the actual fear that the natives have for White, as George Orwell feels that it might weaken his status. So he used the opportunity of shooting an elephant to show his strength.

Source:

Orwell, George. "Shooting an Elephant". Literature Network. Autumn 1936 .

Online <http://www.online-literature.com/orwell/887/>