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मध्य भारती

मानविकी एवं समाजविज्ञान की द्विभाषी शोध-पत्रिका

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ISSUES IN POST-INDEPENDENT SOMALIA AS REFLECTED IN NURUDDIN FARAH'S *MAPS*

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Abstract: The present research attempts to explore, analyse and interpret various major issues in the post-independent Somali society as depicted in Nuruddin Farah's novel, *Maps*. The issues like frequent wars between Somalia and Ethiopia over the possession of Ogaden region, segregation of Somali people and issue of their national identity and suffering of common masses in a war-affected country and miserable condition of children and women during and after every war situation are major and recurrent issues in the post-independent Somali society. The root cause of all these major issues is the grave mistake of irrationally drawn maps of various African territories by the colonisers during the colonial era which isolated culturally homogenous Somali people of community from the mainland Somalia and forced them to stay segregated. Farah has very vividly depicted these burning problems, their root causes, their aftermaths and has also suggested some feasible solutions to them in the novel.

Key words: Colonialism, hegemony,

Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986) is the first novel in his second trilogy, *Blood in the Sun*. It is a wonderful saga of adolescent Somali youths represented by Askar, who are very passionate to reunite their fellow Somalis and the Ogaden region to the mainland Somalia and they want fight for it. Askar, the protagonist of the novel, is an orphan adolescent boy of Somali origin, who was brought up by Misra, a woman of Ethiopian origin. His mother died immediately after giving birth to him. His father was a freedom fighter who fought for the nation, who dies in a war against Ethiopia over the Ogaden region. The meaning of his name is a person who is a bearer of arms, however he never takes any weapon in his hands to liberate Somali people in the Ogaden region. He mind oscillates between his future plans of becoming a poet and a warrior. He just passionately fancies his chances of participating in a war against Ethiopia, but never does so. He is a perplexed and passive young man.

The story of the novel takes place on two levels- individual and national. On the one hand, it is a tale of a growing-up adolescent orphan boy, Askar and his surrogate mother, Misra and on the other hand, it is a story of deteriorated international relations between Somalia and Ethiopia and a series of conflicts over the Somalia-Ethiopia border and mainly over the possession of Ogaden region which is officially in Ethiopia since the British colonisers gave it to Ethiopia in 1948. In the course of time, the hostility between Somalia and Ethiopia increases and the series of wars worsens the international relations between them. It affects the wonderful mother-son relationship between Askar and his surrogate mother, Misra and becomes the cause of their heartbreaking separation.

The novel has background of the actual events happened in the late 1970s in the horn of Africa. It is set against the backdrop of two-year Somalia-Ethiopia war that took place from 1977 to 1978 over the possession of Ogaden region. The five-point star in the national flag of Somalia indicates that the people of Somali origin are spread across five regions in the North-East Africa and these regions are former Italian Somaliland, former British Somaliland, Djibouti, the Ogaden region in Ethiopia and the North Eastern region in Kenya. Farah through the character of Uncle Hilaal vindicates the claim that all the Somalis living in neighbouring countries of Somalia should be together.

The brutal process of European colonialism divided the people of Africa in different regions. It mainly happened after the Berlin Conference of European imperial powers which took place in

Germany in 1984 and 1985. The European colonisers did not take into account the ethnic and cultural affiliations among the African people living in different parts of Africa before irrationally drawing maps and borders of various regions in Africa. The British colonisers handed over the Somali populated Ogaden region to Ethiopia at the time their departure and since then it is one of the major causes of war between Somalia and Ethiopia. Askar tells to a girl that Somali people were united during the colonial period: "My father lived there in the forties when all of the Somali-speaking territories were united under one colonial flag, all but one, Djebouti" (137). The divide and rule policy of the colonisers divided the Somali people in five different regions.

The unreasonable and unjust division of African people and their territories is the cause of border conflicts and other related issues in Africa. Somalia-Ethiopia cultural and political conflict over the Ogaden region now in Ethiopia is one of the outcomes of European colonisation of Africa. Farah claims that all the Somalis living in these five regions have common homogenous culture and hence all these territories should be united in the Democratic Republic of Somalia. Farah claims that Somalis are culturally unique people on the African continent (174).

The novel focuses on the aftermaths of reconstructed maps of African territories in the Horn of Africa, especially it highlights negative consequences of reconstructed maps by the European colonisers in Somalia. Askar receives a very important gift of map of the globe as he enters into adulthood from his maternal uncle, Hilaal. Farah skillfully uses various images in the novel. One of the images is the map of the world. Maps are generally perceived as the reliable models of reality and sometimes they are also perceived as the restructuring of reality. Farah gives emphasis on this characteristic of maps as a restructured reality.

Cultural hegemony is one of the characteristics of colonialism as well as of neocolonialism. Language transmits culture from one generation to another generation and colonisers generally impose their language on the colonised subjects to maintain superiority and dominance of their culture. The British colonisers left the Ogaden region of Somali-speaking people in 1948 after handing it over to Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian empire simply and immediately took the place of the departed European colonisers and started treating Somali-speaking people in the same way as the earlier colonisers did. The Ethiopian government imposed its national language on the colonised Somalis. Here the colonizing power is not western, but another African nation. The Ethiopians did not hesitate to oppress and torture their own fellow Africans. They do not leave any opportunity of domination over the Somalis in the region. They are forced either to adopt the colonizer's language and culture or to leave the region. Uncle Hilaal explains this to his nephew, Askar:

"For example, the Ethiopians poison their wells, rape their women and conscript their children into the Ethiopian army or the police force. They compel them to learn Amharic, force them to adopt the 'Amharic' culture and dispossess them of their land" (164).

Farah points out contradictions in the attitude and behaviour of men towards women. On the one hand, the men consider their country as their mother land, they adore it, sing its praises; on the other hand, they behave rudely and disrespectfully to the women in their country. They continue to treat them very badly. The status and condition of women in formerly colonised regions does not improve a lot even after political independence of their countries. The stereotypes and prejudices about women continue even in post-colonial period. Gender inequality and oppression of common women is clearly visible in Somalia and even in every authoritarian family, patriarchal society and sovereign nation in the world. Uncle Hilaal scolds

his nephew, Askar about his bad-mannered behaviour with his surrogate mother, Misra, when he says:

“Now what I cannot understand is how you can allow yourself, intelligent as you are, sensitive as you are, to be so irreverent towards a woman who had once been like a mother to you?.” (196)

Discourse is a very powerful and effective tool, especially for the powerful in the society and in the world. The discourse in the mainstream media plays a very crucial role in the construction of images about a community or a nation. The colonisers always used this power of discourse for their benefit. They manipulated it as per their convenience in order to achieve their aims. The colonial discourse about the colonisers always created negative stereotypes and spread wrong and incomplete perceptions about the natives and their customs. Farah argues that the discourse in the western media helps to continue the colonial mentality of the colonisers as well as of the colonised subjects. Uncle Hilaal exposes the working of the western press to Askar:

“Note, please, that the prejudice of the western press feeds the acquired prejudices of the colonial and neocolonial peoples, as much as it misinforms the under informed in Europe or North America” (189).

Farah criticises the European colonisers for wrongly drawing map of the African continent. The colonisers tried to distort the reality. They developed infrastructure only which was needed to facilitate their communication and trade. Moreover, they focused more on developing urban areas and coastal ports and always ignored interior parts and remote areas of the colonised regions. Farah describes the nature of neocolonial governments with regard to the development in the developing and poor countries. They continue the pattern of development practiced by the colonisers by focusing more and more development of urban areas and totally neglecting the rural areas.

The importance of official map of a country is highlighted throughout the novel. Map is the most important metaphor in the novel. It symbolizes national identity of the people. Moreover, it creates a sense of nationalism and patriotism among the citizens. The people of Somalia once fight for the reunification of the Ogaden region with Somalia and they win it. Nonetheless, they do not include the conquered territory in their official map. They just fought the battle for the region and won it, but did not release their official map with the inclusion of conquered territory. Hence, it remains officially in the map of Ethiopia. Once again it is an example dominance of written discourse over the oral discourse.

Farah points out the horrible consequences of incorrigible mistakes done by the colonial masters during the colonial era. The colonisers illogically drew the maps of territories on the African continent and it became cause of perpetual conflict between neighbouring African nations. Somalia-Ethiopia conflict is one of them. Two countries fight for the disputed Ogaden region. Poor country like Somalia and its people suffer a lot due to a very heavy loss of people as well as of property. It affects a lot economy of the nation. Farah draws to attention the disastrous impact of war on Somalia:

“It was a very expensive war, claiming lots of lives and properties. . . Everything except hunger, corruption and poverty, became scarce. People began to be unkind to one another and kindness became one of those rare commodities” (168).

Farah shows optimism in the latter part of the novel. He points out that wars are not good for any nation. They prove very costly for everyone. He advises that Somalis should avoid wars and should not get disheartened by the fact that their fellow Somalis are separated from them. However, they should think that they are united. He encourages his fellow Somalis to not to lose hope and to keep the fighting spirit alive. He advises his people to forget the sad past and be hopeful for the future.

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In the novel, a story of identity crisis in the individual lives of major characters is connected very skillfully and symbolically to the tale of struggle for national identity. He has thrown light on various aspects of neocolonialism present in the contemporary post-colonial Somali society. He mainly focuses on war between Somalia and Ethiopia caused due to a mistake in the colonial era, issue of national identity and suffering of common people, women and children. He depicts colonial consciousness by constantly referring to the divide and rule policy of the colonial masters, the effect of 'scramble for Africa' and creation of inappropriately drawn maps. He shows influence and interference of rich and powerful nations in the external affairs of an independent nation. He finally depicts the suffering of his fellow Somalis caused due to war and appeals for peace and optimism.

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