Globalization and its Discontents with reference to Viveka Shanbhag’s

*Riding the Tiger*

Dr. Nasreen Banu Jamadar

The successful stories of Viveka Shanbhag, who has published five collections of stories, revolve around gigantic Hydro-electric projects, MNCs and the globalised IT industry. *Nirvana*, for instance, narrated in a comic-ironic mode, shows how the MNCs obliterate all distinctions like caste, language and nationality of their employees. Whereas *Kantu* is centred on a village about to be submerged in the huge reservoir being built, *Huli Savari* depicts the way management-trainees are taught how to make huge profits in far-flung and backward countries. In fact, the title of the story *Huli Savari*, which means ‘to ride a tiger’, can be considered a metaphor for most of his stories: once one is after money, it is like riding a tiger; one can neither continue to ride nor get down from the tiger’s back.

Globalization can be viewed as the process of metamorphosis of local or regional phenomena into global ones. It is an ongoing process for the integrity of regional economies, societies and cultures through worldwide networks of exchange. Globalization is often used to refer to economic globalization, that is, “integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment (by corporations and multinationals), short-term capital flows, and international flows of workers and humanity generally, and flows of technology.” *(In Defense of Globalization)*

Or as in a broad overview definition, “globalization is the worldwide process of homogenizing prices, products, wages, rates of interest and profits.” *(Global Economic Integration: Prospects and Problems)*) Accordingly globalization has been established as a key idea in the economics and just as a buzzword of academic milieu since 1990s, the term has become one of the most hotly debated issues of the previous and present centuries in other areas of human knowledge such as social, political, cultural and literary studies, as economics couldn’t be dealt with separately.

Vivek Shanbag narrates a story *Riding the Tiger* in a first person narration. A training camp is arranged in Mumbai and narrator is selected as executive among twelve other countries. In a training camp all trainees from different countries are asked to prepare themselves for new posts and greater responsibilities and camp is made to make them aware of cultures and business practices of other countries. Story revolves around a character named Uche an African. Ten days time is given for them to understand and exchange way of life and ethnicity of each other’s country. In order to settle the business task they must understand the need and mind set of the people in which country they are going to project their business for the benefit. After spending time in the camp on the eighth day all are given their activities for the task
of business and everything they have to apply for as a part of game. Whatever training and tricks are taught each and every step must be expected to apply here thus:

Sixty pages, which we had to read, told us the rules of the game, what we could produce, what procedures we had to follow to open new factories, what products we could sell in which countries, what technology was available and how much time and money we would need to develop new technology, how much we would have to pay workers, what labour problems we might face, which countries were democracies and which military regimes, what religion the majority practised, and such other details. (Riding the Tiger)

Organizer of this game is the man who is from England whose name is Peter. In narrators team Uche and another man called Jeff, Dutch origin, born and brought up in England. He had worked as an accountant and risen from the ranks at a young age. The game started. They have to sell their products at the end of the month. They are given a list updating them on where a particular product is in demand. They have to write details of products they wished to sell and their prices in each country. Only Peter knew the prices quoted by the other companies. The lowest bidders would get first priority. If they declined, the offer would go to the next lowest bidders. He would sort out the slips by product and market, and announce whose tenders had been accepted.

In Uche’s group prices turned out too high in the first month and they didn't win even a single tender. It seems very difficult for them to sell their product with expected profit. Jeff also making them alerts that how it would affect their business in loss. By the end of two months, their situation has improved a bit. They thought of ways to lower prices, and reworked their logistics so that they could make profits for which they had all information about their factories:

-- the number of workers, wages to be paid, production capacity, actual productivity and so on. (Riding the Tiger)

They could have employed new technology and opened new factories. That way, and by not taking into account the initial investment, they could have produced quite cheaply. They had better production potential in two of their factories, and they were not producing to capacity. They leafed through the regulations to see how they could set that right. They learnt about the labour problems there. If they conceded two demands, productivity was likely to go up by ten per cent. A machine had become old and four or five workers were getting injured in accidents every year. The first demand was that this machine be replaced. This would cost them a lakh. The second demand was a ten per cent wage hike.

Any attempt to make a quick review on the history of globalization is underscored by two key points. First is the fact that the
The moment the game began after breakfast, Jeff raised the subject of going to Africa. Uche said it was out of the question. They felt Uche was overdoing it. No team had yet set foot in Africa. If they didn't get there first, there was no way they could increase their team profits. Narrator tries to explain to them from the details in the report given to them.

In deciding profit and business they have to understand each other and other thing that they have to know conditions of those countries and their economical condition will be affected by it. As African example and their condition must be studied by an Indian and other team mates in Uche’s team narrator observes feelings thus:

“We are all still slaves. We have a democracy only in name. A distant relative of mine had become the president. The present ruler murdered him and brought in military rule. He put up a show of elections and has been in power for fifteen years. We are forbidden to use the word ‘president’ to refer to anyone but him. In our country, our company has a chairman, not a president, as in yours... Our country used to grow a lot of cocoa at one time. The earlier government had built
huge warehouses for its export. People looked upon them as an impressive achievement of the previous government, so he destroyed all of them. He made the people poor. Yet he encouraged their desire to buy. Big companies from other countries were also involved in this conspiracy. He ensured that nothing was produced in our country. Even this shirt I wear has to be made and given to me by someone else. All indigenous industries are dying for want of technology and government support. We are still alive because we get some petrol and oil from our land. All of it belongs to the government. Food distribution is in the government’s hands. They only distribute products of big companies. Our taste, smell, clothes and the amount of food we eat… everything’s changing. (Riding the Tiger)

The impact of colonizers on colonized is still seen in the colonies. Even after their independence they have under the impression that they could not lead a life of their own choice. Sometimes these all modernity and alternative modernity make such all colonized to depend on colonizers.

In 2001 and at the Globalcities Conference held at Michigan State University, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak made her contribution on globalization debates and started her introduction with highlighting four prevailing modes of globalization:

First, that there is nothing new about it: attempts to take in the available world in a system are as old as history. In other words, globalization is a repetition. Second, that globalization as such can be identified with the efforts at global governance signaled by the Bretton Woods Conference, remotely inaugurating a postcolonial and a postnational world. Third, that the entire globe is now in a common culture fix, and its signature is urbanism. And finally, that globalization is distinguished from world trade and world systems through the ascendancy of finance capital, helped by the silicon chip and the Fall of the Wall. In other words, that globalization is a rupture.

The new concept of “planetarity” proposed by Spivak also makes a different twist in social and cultural debates of globalization. She believes that the rural should be considered as the real front of globalization. Spivak specifies last chapter of her book Death of a Discipline to this counter concept of “planetarity” in order to clarify her stance against what she perceives as destructive realities of globalization. As Katie Smith reviews “Spivak argues that the popular conception of globalization as the financialization and computerization of the globe leads to a vicious system of exploitation, whereby it is assumed that the globe (as a kind of imaginary terrain that exists only on our computers) can and should be controlled to produce capitalist gains. Planetarity, on the other hand, is a more sensitive and attuned
way of understanding the materiality of the world and our collective place and responsibility as humans within it.”

However some writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa, who believes, “the most effective attacks against globalization are usually not those related to economics; instead, they are social, ethical, and, above all, cultural,” finds the causes of globalization’s deficiencies somewhere else. He asserts:

Even though I believe this cultural argument against globalization is unacceptable, we should recognize that deep within it lies an unquestionable truth. This century, the world in which we will live will be less picturesque and imbued with less local color than the one we left behind. The festivals, attire, customs, ceremonies, rites, and beliefs that in the past gave humanity its folkloric and ethnological variety are progressively disappearing or confining themselves to minority sectors, while the bulk of society abandons them and adopts others more suited to the reality of our time. All countries of the earth experience this process, some more quickly than others, but it is not due to globalization. Rather, it is due to modernization, of which the former is effect, not cause.

Colonizers always try to keep their hold on colonized so the same feelings and same situations faced by Uche and his country and narrator in India. When narrator hears Uche’s thought and concern with a frustration and anger to bring out his own country in a condition and self dependency where their business profit is also work with the progress. Narrator reveals his way of life and conditions with what he stays away for learning a business mind thus:

I lost as I spoke about our customs, beliefs, marriage rituals, the aspirations of my middle class parents, the pride my worker-father felt on my being in this kind of a job. I told him about Gandhi. I told him about the freedom we had won in 1947 and the politics of the country, I told him about the anxieties that rob me of my sleep. I told him about my childhood, I told him about my wife. I described to him colourfully how some people are possessed, I told him about the taste of patrode. (Riding the Tiger)

We cannot assume that there is an unproblematic association between post-colonial thought and the Third World intellectual. As Radhakrishnan (1996: 155) indicates, the term ‘postcoloniality’ rarely surfaces within the formerly colonized worlds of South Asia and Africa. Indeed, in the words of one African political scientist, the current international scene would be better described in terms of a ‘recolonization of subject peoples’ (Tandon, 1994), where it is contended that the imperial north has extended its sources of control (economic, political and military) over the subordinated peoples of the south. Similarly, and also with Africa as the main focus, Ould-Mey (1994) is of the view that the development and strengthening of international institutions
under global adjustment is bringing about a new form of ‘multilateral imperialism’.

In an important sense this theoretical and political contradistinction is somewhat ironic in that if we examine the work of the three writers most associated with the post-colonial as a site of critical inquiry, namely, Said, Spivak and Bhabha, it becomes clear that there is a hybridity of theoretical orientation. Said (1978, 1993), for example, combines conceptual groundings from Gramsci and Foucault, while also being critical of the tendency to turn Marxist categories into terminal abstractions. Spivak (1988, 1990, 1996), in her work on the subaltern, representation and post-colonial literature, combines Marxist categories with an incisive post-structuralist sensibility, and frequently introduces such categories as ‘the international division of labour’, ‘neocolonialism’ and ‘global capitalism’, while also deploying an adapted ‘Derridean gaze’. Perhaps Bhabha (1994, 1996) appears to be the least Marxist of the three, but here also there is a reproblematization rather than a rejection.

The contemporary focus on multiculturalism, and the politics of recognition, as manifested in debates on the rights of ethnic and racial minorities, can stimulate a renewed interest in the nature of relations with other cultures, emphasizing the potential of intersubjectivity and understanding across borders. In recurring to the line of attack we think about the inconsistencies of the global, it is both possible and desirable to give greater priority to the unevenness of global processes, in terms of the object of learning as well as the causes of facts. While the post-structural and postmodern may help us to move away from the inflexibilities and certitudes of previously influential modes of interpretation, the post-colonial can enable us to go beyond the limits of universalist western approaches to globalization and global politics. In this way our understanding may become more genuinely global and more critically vibrant. Connecting the post-colonial with the global can bring into being a renewed sense of space and temporality, in which a decentred, cross-border rewriting of earlier nation-centred imperial narratives calls forth a rethinking of the global.

Narrator understands how Uche, Jeff and his own problem is with their country’s problem to improve their business and profit and when they are after this profit and money in their management it seems riding the tiger. When narrator observes:

The darkness inside their houses, their empty meal plates, the blank looks of uncles who had lost their jobs, voices that trembled as they sang, teeth that parted in affectionate smiles, sleepless eyes, beliefs and dreams, lifestyles that had changed so much men couldn't even hug their wives.... Instead of looking at the map merely in accounting terms, as Jeff was doing, Uche was unravelling hundreds of threads.(Riding the Tiger)

As they all consider it part of game and they are helpless to make any change towards their countries situations. Narrator and his team thought of continuing their work.

It is a question not only of how we theoretically approach issues associated with global politics and cultural change, but
also of who are the subjects of knowledge in such theorizations, and how do a variety of historical and geopolitical contextualizations influence the ideas, concepts and thematic priorities developed by those same subjects or agents of knowledge.

Works Cited:


