

Imperialism and the Elephant in Burma: An Analytical Perception of George Orwell's 'Shooting the Elephant'

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ABSTRACT

Burma had been under British occupation through 1824 to 1948, the British rule brought social, economic, cultural and administrative changes; during which it was also administered as a province of India.

Moulmein, the capital of British Burma, is the setting of George Orwell's famous 1936 memoir 'Shooting the Elephant'. Orwell, born in India and brought up in Britain, held the post of Assistant Superintendent in the British Indian Imperial Police in Burma. Moulmein was full of elephants employed to haul logs in the timber firms; ordinary tamed elephants, for centuries had been part of Burmese life.

The essay describes the experience and anguish of the English narrator, possibly Orwell himself, called upon to shoot an aggressive elephant while working as a police officer in Burma.

The story is looked upon as an allegory for British imperialism. Orwell's other publications, like this one too, generally reflected the mood of the times and relied heavily on contemporary happenings.

Through the analysis of the essay in question, this paper intends to bring to the fore the importance of the elephants in Burmese society, with the imperial spectre looming large over the political horizon. Where the elephant represents a symbol of the oppression of the Burmese society, its death is a parallel of how the British Empire struggled to suppress the natives.

Keywords: *Burma, Imperialism, Elephants, George Orwell, Moulmein*

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