

Article**Purushotham Chalapathi****Colonial and Postcolonial Shades in James Cameron's *Avatar***

**Abstract:** *Avatar* (2009), a science fiction film written and directed by James Cameron, has become one of the all-time classics in the film world. James Cameron's vision and mission in making this film is fantastic as it has been owned by the film lovers from all corners of the world. It is said that an image speaks thousand words. Then, what is about a film as it is a pool of images with audio-visuals? Literature is the mirror of the society while James Cameron's *Avatar* is a representation of certain literary themes such as colonial and postcolonial perspectives. In fact, as colonization and its consequences have been almost similar in all contexts of the colonial world, in this article British colonization in India has been taken as instances contextually.

**Keywords:** Science fiction, literature, colonization, colonial and postcolonial perspectives.

**Introduction:**

James Cameron, an invincible Canadian film auteur, has made divergent genres such as *Piranha II: The Spawning* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *Aliens* (1986), *The Abyss* (1989), *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), *True Lies* (1994), *Titanic* (1997), *Ghost of the Abyss* (2003), *Aliens of the Deep* (2005), *Avatar* (2009) and his upcoming *Avatar Series* (2022, 2024, 2026 & 2028). Indeed, although he made divergent genres, majority of his works are science fiction genres in which more are blockbusters, award winning films. Nevertheless, he remains one of the top directors in the Hollywood because of his dream project *Avatar* (2009) which is a classic science fiction epic and created history in Hollywood. Moreover, it brought him appreciation from the film admirers and acclamation from the film critics all over the world.

James Cameron seems to have taken his autonomy in choosing the interesting and inspiring contents, dynamic characterisation, suitable artists, expertise technical crew, engaging screenplay, beautiful and wonderful visuals and vision-mission in executing the whole *Avatar* project. Resulted in, *Avatar* has been owned by the audience from the all corners of the world. In fact, *Avatar* has no specific target audience which is the prime formula in making films in order to get the returns of the expenditure. However, the film lovers from the age 'Six to Sixty' can enjoy the *Avatar* film since beginning till the end which is the magic of the visualisation of screenplay on the silver screen. If *Avatar* has been watched in "3D or 4D" that will lead us virtually to the Pandoran biosphere, the Earth-like moon, teems with biodiversity of bioluminescent species ranging from six-legged animals to other types of exotic fauna and flora.

It is said that an image speaks thousand words. Then, what is about a film as it is pool of images with audio-visuals?! 'Literature is the mirror of the Society' while James Cameron's *Avatar*, although a science fiction, is a representation of several literary thematic concerns such as Paganism, Eco-criticism, Environmentalism, Colonialism and Postcolonialism, Tribalism and Spiritualism and so on. However, this article primarily focuses on Colonial and Postcolonial shades in James Cameron's *Avatar*.

**Colonial Shades in *Avatar*:**

Before discussing the colonial shades in *Avatar*, it is needed to recollect the structure of colonialism once. The term 'colonization' can be defined as the process of establishing foreign control over the target territories or the indigenous people. The established settlers altogether are called 'colony'. The established foreign personnel are named 'colonizers'. The people of the indigenous territory who are controlled by the colonizers are termed 'colonized'. The capital of the established colony or colonies is known as 'metropolis' (mother-city). In fact, the total system of governance of the colonies resembles the autonomous nation. However, domination of the colonizers and subjugation of the colonized are the two parallel elements to be noted in colonial system. All these together connote the ideology of 'colonization' or 'colonialism'. Because of these two consequences such as domination and subjugation happened to be continued for a long time, the

indigenous started to revolt and resist against the colonizers. Consequently, the colonial settlers left for their 'metropolitan state' (mother country), and it is termed 'decolonization' or 'decolonialism'. In general, decolonialism happens after the colonialism and its several historical consequences (positive and negative). Therefore, these are altogether called 'postcolonialism'.

### 1. Migration: From the Earth to the Pandora

According to the History, the colonialism begins with migration from the metropolitan state (mother country) to a far distance with a specific objective/s. When we take an example of colonialism in India, the prime objectives of conquest, occupancy and settlement are for religious expansion; looting wealth and natural resources; trading and exporting the basic commodities including cotton, raw silk, wool, jute, indigo dye, sugar, salt, spices, saltpetre, tea and opium and so on; importing and selling the finished consumer goods like woollen clothes, cotton, silk, machinery, raw metals particularly copper and iron, metal manufactures and railway materials and so on. Moreover, perhaps the Europeans might have thought that



Image: 1

Parker Selfridge words to Dr. Grace Augustine

“Right. Come here.

I can't... I can't ...

This is why we are here. Unobtainium.

Because this little gray rock sells for 20 million a kilo.

That's the only reason. It's what pays for the whole party. It's what pays for your Science.”

India was the biggest market platform to sell their goods and buy (loot) our goods (sources). Therefore, it seems between 1870 and 1895, India was the biggest customer of Britain's Lancashire cotton industry. Likewise, In James Cameron's Avatar, migration takes place from the Earth to the Pandora. In 2154, when human beings have depleted the natural resources, it would lead to severe energy crisis on the Earth. Resulting in, human beings leave for the Pandora for Unobtainium, which is rock in gray that sells for 20 million a kilo on the Earth. In general, the migration from one place to another place takes place on foot or through distinctive transportation facilities. Nevertheless, History says that if the distance of the target region is to be occupied is far and no road transportation facility is available to reach it, the colonizers will depend on 'ship voyage'. Therefore, in Avatar the human beings depends on 'spaceship' to reach the Pandora.



Image: 2

Spaceship travelling to the Pandora in James Cameron's Avatar (2009)



Image: 3

East India Company's 'Earl of Abergavenny', off South Sea, an Oil painting (1801) by Thomas Luny

## 2. Corporate Set-up: The RDA

Colonialism, as it has already been discussed, happens with a specific agenda. Therefore, in order to execute their agenda, it is needed leadership and governance. Therefore, in this context, the *East India Company* seems to be the best example. The East India Company was founded on 31 December 1600, formed to trade in the Indian Ocean region. The company, obviously, had seized control of large parts of the Indian subcontinent. In fact, the similar colonial consequences might have taken place in all parts of British colonies. Nevertheless, it might not be happened that easily as said in the words. Then, what was there to execute the colonization and the expansion of the colonies?! Obviously the corporate governance might have played crucial role through the dynamic leadership and timely decision making in the East India Company.

Similarly, the RDA (Resources Development Administration) in Avatar seems to be a corporate structure embedded with appropriate administrative set-up viz. Parker Selfridge, the corporate administrator (head) of the RDA mining operation; Colonel Miles Quaritch, the head of the defence (security) wing of the mining operation; Dr. Grace Augustine, an [exobiologist](#) and head of the Avatar Program; the scientists such as Dr. Norm Spellman and Dr. Max Patel; Jake Sully, a diplomat of RDA; and other technical and supporting crew members and so on. In fact, the whole administration of the RDA seems to be balancing the horizontal and vertical leadership contextually. The objective of the RDA is to loot the richest deposits of Unobtainium which are located in the subterranean of the giant Hometree. However, unfortunately the innocent indigenous [Na'vi](#) people happen to reside upon and under the same sacred Hometree that has become a curse for them as they remained victims by the RDA.

## 3. Imperialism: With Men and Material Force

The term 'colonialism' generally has been used primarily to describe the European conquest, settlement and systematic administrative control over another country or territory. For instance, Europeans' dominance over the territories in Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), Ceylon (Sri Lank) and Singapore etc.), Africa, South America, Canada and Australia and so on. Nonetheless, it cannot be possible for conquest or control over another country or territory without men (military personnel) and material force (advanced war vehicles and weapons) to the individuals or institutions. Therefore, despite many scholars have argued that there is clear distinction between the imperialism and colonialism, imperialism is often conflated with colonialism as they travel together towards single agenda i.e. establishing colonies, but no matter how they do the things done?!



Image: 4

Colonel Miles Quaritch warning to his fellow military personnel

“You are not in Kansas anymore. You are on Pandora, ladies and gentlemen. Respect that fact every second of everyday.

If there is a hell, you might want to go there for some R&R after a tour on Pandora. Out there, beyond that fence, every living thing that crawls, flies or squats in the mud wants to kill you and eat your eyes for jujubes.

We have an indigenous population of humanoids called the Na'vi. They are fond of arrows dipped in neurotoxin that will stop your heart in one minute. And they have bones reinforced with naturally occurring carbon fibre. They are very hard to kill.

As head of security, it is my job to keep you alive. I will not succeed, not with all of you. If you wish to survive, you need to cultivate a strong mental attitude. You have got to obey the rules, Pandora rules.”



**C-21 Dragon Assault Ship**

Image: 5



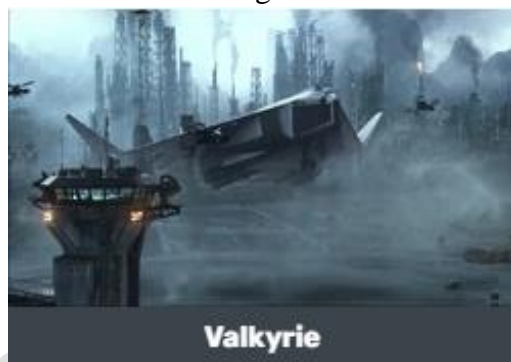
**Aerospatiale SA-2 Samson**

Image: 6



**Scorpion Gunship**

Image: 7



**Valkyrie**

Image: 8

#### Advanced War Vehicles

In the same way, the RDA mining operation in Avatar has been coordinated with the Colonel Miles Quaritch, the head of the defence (security) wing of the mining operation, along with his trained armed forces. Their duty is to protect the team of the RDA from the indigenous humanoids called the Na'vi in Pandora who are intelligent on par with the human, very tall and physically stronger than the human beings. They are very good at archery and fond of arrows dipped in a neurotoxin which can stop the human heart in one minute. Moreover, they are not happy of the human invasion into their home land (Hometree). Therefore, the RDA team always happened to be under the control of the armed personnel with distinctive advanced war vehicles and weapons such as Ammunition Dispenser Pod, Wasp, AMP Suit Knife, Assault Rifle, Combat Shotgun, Bush Boss FD-3 and CARB Weapon System etc. just to defend the Na'vi and protect the RDA and themselves.

#### Postcolonial Shades in Avatar:

Postcolonialism, as said in the beginning, is the mixture of positive and negative results or consequences. However, history evidenced more negative and less positive impact after colonialism irrespective of the colony or territory or period (time). When it comes to the Indian context of postcolonialism, economic, social and cultural changes took place. Revenue, postal and administrative (bureaucracy) systems were introduced; commercialisation of agriculture products such as tea, coffee, indigo, opium, cotton, jute, sugarcane and oilseed and so on; abolishing Sati, creating awareness on child marriages and superstitions; introducing English education system, allopathic medicine, christianity and western dress, recipes and food hobbies and so on; western sports such as cricket, soccer and tennis etc. were introduced to Indians; western infrastructure, technology and architecture had been launched in construction of railway tracks, bridges, canals, dams, roads and several public buildings such as railway stations and universities and so on; western education and intellectuality had been imported; nationalism and patriotism had been triggered in all corners of India; ‘unity in diversity’ was proved during colonial revolt and resistance; thought process of Indians had been changed during colonial ruling. Moreover, it was the root cause for today’s globalization.

Actually, above all these are of the one side of the coin of postcolonialism in India. The other side the coin of postcolonialism, on contrary, is very dark, destruction and deception in postcolonial India. The colonization was the root cause for capitalism and monopoly; looting and degradation of natural resources; exports and imports of natural resources and machine made clothes, textile machinery, and other distinguished machinery equipment and so on; moreover, postcolonialism brought the imperialism and it caused for several violent incidents, blood stains, shot deaths in India; introducing urbanization and modernization which polluted the minds and deeds of the people of India; foreign diseases were introduced to livestock and humans; political ideology of ‘divide and rule’ was introduced to Indian politics that led for the partition of India and Pakistan. However, truly the above were the more or less similar consequences might have occurred in all the colonies such as British colony, French colony, Dutch colony, Portuguese colony and Spanish colony and so on. Likewise, there are a few noteworthy postcolonial impacts can be tangible in James Cameron’s Avatar through critical analysis.

### 1. English Education:

English education was one of the occurrences of postcolonialism in all British colonies. Perhaps, it was one of the strategies to deceive the indigenous people of the colonies were concerned just to get their trust on them. Similarly, in Avatar, English education takes place at Dr. Grace Augustine’s school. Dr. Grace Augustine’s objectives of the school are to teach the Na’vi English and human culture. But, the RDA’s objectives of the English education at

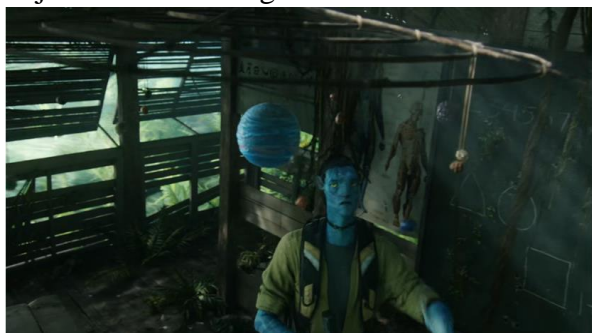


Image: 9



Image: 10

Dr. Grace Augustine’s School

Dr. Grace Augustine’s school are to communicate with the Na’vi and try to convince them to evacuate the Hometree. Nevertheless, it could not get materialized because of the massacre by the defence (private security force) wing of the RDA headed by Colonel Miles Quaritch. Unfortunately, many children were killed and one of them is the clan leader’s daughter, Sylwanin who is the elder sister of Neytiri. Resulted in, she lost the trust of the Na’vi and the school was shut down.

### 2. Imperialism and Destruction:

The world’s history confirms that Imperialism is the synonym of destruction in the name of prevention or protection or construction of the peace. Actually, the military forces would be associated with colonial authority who would have specific objectives which can be executed

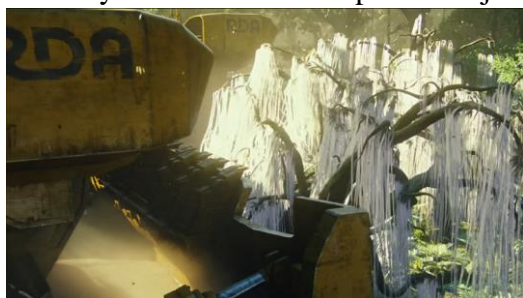


Image: 11

Demolition of Tree of Souls



Image: 12

Demolition of Hometree

by them. Once the imperialists commence their action, it would not end without blood stains, violence and destruction. In addition, sometimes it may lead to massive killings like Jallianwala Bagh massacre, took place on 13 April 1919 in Amritsar, Punjab, India. In the same way, destruction has been clearly noticeable in Avatar as the Tree of Souls and Hometree were demolished by the RDA forces by the giant bulldozer and throwing firing the massive deposits of explosives. Resulting in, Eytukan, the Omaticaya's clan leader and a few of innocent indigenous Na'vi people happen to pass away of serious injuries while several get injured and saved by the fellow Na'vi people. Their agony of this incident cannot be mentioned in words as they lost their Hometree, leader and lives of their near and dear ones.

### 3. Nationalism, Patriotism and Leadership Emergence:

According to the empirical understanding of Colonialism and Imperialism, they are like parallel lines travel side by side towards a single destination. These two mutually coordinate and collaborate to each other to reach their destination. In this process of reaching their objectives, the natives of the colonies could witness the destruction, deception and dark side of them. But, majority of the locals were helpless because of several practical reasons. Moreover, they happened to wait for someone who can protect them from the colonial ruling. Therefore, if it is considered the Indian context of postcolonialism is concerned, colonialism and its dirty politics, bad policies and cruel practices had been the prime reasons for the scope of the emergence of new and dynamic leaderships like Alluri Sitarama Raju, B.R. Ambedkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Kamarajar, Komarm Bheem, Mangal Pandey, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Lakshmibai-the Rani of Jhansi, Sardar Vallabhbhi Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sri Aurobindo, Subramania Bharati, Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu, Veerapandiya Kattabomman and Veer Savarkar and so on. In fact, Nationalism and Patriotism were the big weapons for the leaders to motivate the masses against the colonialism and they could achieve the success against the colonizers historically. Moreover, it was the same scenario of all colonies in emergence of their distinguished leaderships against the colonialism.

Likewise, in Avatar, the colonization of the RDA on Pandora and their brutal attitude towards the Na'vi happened to create the critical circumstances and life-and-death problems with no solutions to the innocent and indigenous Na'vis. Indeed, all these consequences have been the prime reasons for the emergence of the distinguished leaderships and they are including, Jake Sully, Tsu'tey, Neytiri, Eytukan, Mo'at, Dr. Grace Augustine, Dr. Norm Spellman, Dr. Max Patel and Trudy Chacon and so on. All these leaders are daring and dynamic and each one of them possesses a unique leadership style. In fact, a true leader may not be a politician involved actively in politics or may not have a few followers, but a true leader must respond,



Image: 13

Eytukan, as the Leader of the Na'vi



Image: 14

Jake, as the Leader of the Na'vi

react and proactive to the problems of the people in order to solve them. Moreover, the leader has to stand after the justice and Dharma to establish or re-establish them when they are ignored and insulted by the evil people. Accordingly, here in Avatar, all the leaders mentioned are proactive to the problems faced by the Na'vi and they could try their level best in finding solution to the problems faced by the Na'vi and re-established the justice and Dharma on Pandora.

#### 4. Colonial Revolt and Resistance:

According to the world's history, revolt and resistance were the attributes of the true leaders for the right causes of the common people. Actually, revolt and resistance are the finale decisions of the leaders while, before that, they have to communicate the problems to the rivals or problem creators are concerned, and try to convince them. Sometimes, the leaders may lose their lives in revolt or resistance like Alluri Sitarama Raju, Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Komarm Bheem and Veerapandiya Kattabomman and many more leaders got martyred during the Indian Independence Movement.

Similarly, in *Avatar*, Jake Sully and Dr. Grace Augustine happened to communicate the beliefs and living culture of the Na'vi to the higher authority of the RDA in order to convince them for stopping the destruction of the Hometree. But, in vain, they were not convinced and in turn, the both were humiliated. Finally, as there were no other options, confrontation begins between the RDA and Ante-RDA. Actually, Jake Sully, Dr. Grace Augustine, Dr. Norm Spellman, Dr. Max Patel and Trudy Chacon are the rebellions of the RDA and Pro-Na'vis. Jake Sully is a daring and dynamic ex-marine who knows how to do and lead war. He is capable of taking right decisions on right time. Though he is a human being and an Avatar diplomat of the RDA, he becomes an advocate of the Na'vi as they are innocent, indigenous people of the Pandora and Justice and Dharma are remaining on their side. Therefore, he being a true leader, tried to re-establish them. His valour, vision and mission to conquer the RDA viz., motivating the Na'vi, gathering all clans of Pandora and seeking their support, coordination with Neytiri, Tsu'tey and Dr. Norm Spellman in the confrontation, employing all his was skills, dynamic movements in destroying the army of the RDA etc. could decide the war one side though RDA is stronger than the Jake's Army. He has been proved that he is one among the Na'vi, for the Na'vi and the true leader of the Na'vi. Then, Eytukan is the actual leader of the Omaticaya clan and shows his dignity, presence of mind and eldership contextually. When the RDA started to destruct the Hometree, he was after protecting his people from the dangerous consequences. He did not care about his life and got heroic-death in service of his people's safeguard. Therefore, he is the man of consequence. Later, Mo'at is the Spiritual leader of the Omaticaya clan. She is a dynamic woman with supernatural powers given by Eywa. Because of her intuitional powers, presence of mind, right decision on right



Image: 15

Mo'at pleading and releasing Jake and Dr. Grace Augustine

“If you are one of us, help us”

time Jake Sully and Dr. Grace Augustine were saved and released from the knots of captivity. Moreover, she has requested Jake to help them from the attacks of the RDA which is, indeed, generic in the battlefield when the situations are not cooperative and the enemies are stronger than us. It is also depending on the leader's right decision on right time. When Jake Sully and Dr. Grace Augustine were released from the captivity, the total scenario has been changed and Jake took the lead and fought on behalf of the Na'vi. Next, Tsu'tey is also a courageous, dynamic warrior who is able to respond according to the situation. His collaboration and coordination with Jake and Neytiri are outstanding during the colonial resistance. And his courage, fighting spirit is unique, but unfortunately he gets heroic-death during the war. Afterward, Neytiri is a courageous woman and her dynamism and movements in resisting along with Jake are appreciable and no one can replace her. After that, Dr. Norm Spellman, Dr. Max Patel and Trudy Chacon have also contributed

their efforts for the Na'vi, but Chacon also gets heroic-death during the finale confrontation. Finally, Dr. Grace Augustine is the head of Avatar programme, the mentor of Jake Sully and a righteous person. Her integrity towards the nature and the Na'vi led her to be part of the Na'vi, fight for the Na'vi and die for the Na'vi. She is a woman of values and virtues.

Therefore, it is understood that revolt and resistance may help to achieve one's liberty and freedom, but they surely witness the blood stains, violence and losing lives of common people and leaders. It is concluded that no pains and no gains.

### **5. Decolonisation:**

Decolonization connotes giving of political independence to a country that was previously a colony. Decolonization is the synonym of Independence of the colonized. Resulted in, the decolonized country can be rejuvenated in terms of its resources, administration, politics, policies and practices under the right leadership of the country. Consequently, the colonizers must leave the colony and they have to go back to their motherland. According to the philosophy of Postcolonial Studies, every colonization, sooner or later, must be witnessed the



Image: 16

Decolonization of the RDA

decolonization. Actually, the realistic consequences caused from colonization to decolonization which include colonial politics, policies and practices; leadership emergence; revolt and resistance against the attitude of the colonizers and declaration of Independence and so on. In fact, the above would be the same, if we study the history of Independence of any decolonized country. Similarly, in Avatar, after long struggle the Na'vi people got Independence from the human centric RDA hailed from the Earth. All the human beings who are alive after the Great War between the RDA and Ante-RDA were sent to the Earth.

### **Conclusion:**

The world history says that still the decolonized countries are well developed, developing and undeveloped. One of the reasons behind this dissimilarity in decolonized countries is lack of good and visionary leadership. Moreover, Avatar is just a science fiction film, but it has been owned by the people (viewers) as the plot consists of colonial reality, capitalist ideology, human emotions, relationships, novelty in characterisation and all these were well organized on silver screen by James Cameron. People (viewers) perceived all the characters as real characters and Pandora as the real world like the Earth. So, there are chances of owning the upcoming sequels as well. So, the total credit goes to James Cameron for his vision and mission of execution of the film. If the same continues in upcoming sequels, hopefully, the renaissance would begin on Pandora under the leadership of Jake Sully.



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**Mr. Purushotham Chalapathi is a communication skills, soft skills and life skills trainer. He is a research scholar in the department of English, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh.**