

Grace Qiu

Mrs. Small

Humanities

13 December 2024

### The Baffling Brits vs the Intelligent Indians: A Skit of Unjustified Colonization

In a section of Trevor Noah's satirical stand-up "How the British Took Over India," Noah tackles the subjects of colonialism, power imbalance, and illogical reasoning with humor and wit. Between 1757 and 1947, the British colonized and occupied India through the East India Company. This historical event created many power imbalances where the colonizers oppressed the Indians. In Noah's stand-up, he precisely satirizes the absurdity of British colonialism with his unique performance style: a stand-up comedy and skit routine. During his skit, Noah's ability to flawlessly portray two polar characters enhances his satire. He switches between two characters, an arrogant British colonizer and the witty Indian man. Acting as the British colonizer, he puffs his chest and mimics the pompous British tone and actions. In contrast, his Indian accent surfaces as he portrays the native man through casual and witty remarks. His hand and head movements along with the cadence and realistic humor comedically embody both characters in a theatrical atmosphere. This approach allows the satire to feel alive and engages the audience. The video format along with the visual cues only further enhances the comedic effects of Noah's satire. Throughout his talk show, Noah uses jargon, repetition, repartee,

and syntactical choices to satirize Great Britain's inability to justify their colonization of India and the absurdity of Britain forcefully colonizing India.

The author uses jargon to mock the British Empire's inflated ego and depict the absurdity of their justification for colonizing India; not only does he use these devices to establish different tones throughout the piece, but he also contrasts the personalities of each character. In the introduction, he uses colloquial phrases such as "cause", "roll up", and "you know" to appear more conversational and approachable (Noah 0:04 0:31 0:42). Since these phrases are commonly used when speaking, he fosters an environment where the audience can feel a sense of familiarity and security. The jargon also signals to the audience that Noah speaks from the heart and does not use a formal, lecturing tone. Rather than just presenting the facts, his casual tone creates a relationship where the audience can relate to him. This relaxed jargon contrasts sharply with the formal and pompous tone as he transitions to portray the British colonizer.

Immediately after the short introduction, he switches to the British colonizer's voice. The first phrase he uses is "Hear ye, hear ye!" a proclamation that was used by a person of authority or importance to command attention (Noah 1:00-1:02). Even though the phrase was used to remind the common people of royal power in the colonial era, Noah uses it as a tool of mockery. In a sense, it portrays how the overdramatic language is out of place and outdated in the current context; similar to how out-of-touch the British colonizers were with the people they were trying to colonize. Noah also mimics the condescending tones of the British by using the phrase "my good man" when referring to

the Indian man (Noah 1:23). Although it sounds polite, it hides a patronizing meaning. In the colonial context, it implies the British own the native population, referring to them as ‘their own’ good man. However, Noah uses it to ridicule the British’s sense of superiority. The last phrase, “she who was ordained,” refers to Queen Victoria who was portrayed as an ordained ruler of Great Britain (Noah 1:57-2:00). Using this phrase, Noah highlights the absurdity of the justification behind colonialism. The colonizers believed they were partaking in a divine mission to spread civilization and rule over the common people. This wrapped the British in a wreath of divinity. Overall, the imperialist jargon plays two roles. It was used in colonial times to elevate the status of the colonizer when in reality, it shows how hollow and ridiculous the British sounded. Against this, Noah juxtaposes the Indian man’s jargon to undermine the legitimacy of British imperialism.

The Indian man speaks in a conversational tone that is much more inviting and relaxed compared to the British colonizer. Using jargon like “my friend” and “oh my god”, these informal expressions convey a sense of casualness (Noah 2:10 4:05-4:06). Instead of sounding pompous and grandiose like the British, these phrases show that the Indian man is an unbothered fellow who is just entertaining the British man. His confidence portrayed through the jargon creates a reversal of power dynamics. Unlike history, where the British were in power, Trevor reversed the roles so that the Indian seemed like he was the one in power. This jargon, mixed with situational irony highlights the absurdness of British imperialism.

Using repetition, Noah mocks the childishness of Great Britain and their inability to produce a logical reason to justify their colonization of India. After the British declared India under the rule of their Queen, the Indian man asked which god he should add to his worshipping list. His frustration and mockery surface as he repeatedly calls upon different gods: “Oh, dear god, dear god, I was hoping that maybe, god you could help me... no no, sorry not you, other god, no, no, other god, no, no, other god...” (Noah 2:56-3:20). The repetitive sequence of the rambling phrases “no no no” and “other god” portrays the absurdity of the situation. The Indian man demonstrates his confusion towards the British man, but the British are unresponsive. Underlying the repetition is also a sense of mockery the Indian subtly conveys to the British. As he explains the absurdity of having a god called God, he indirectly proves that the British are clueless about the cultural diversity of the people they colonize. Not even attempting to understand India’s diverse cultures, the British forcefully impose their monotheistic values into India. However, they have trouble justifying the logistics behind the colonization.

As the British try to justify the reasoning behind colonizing India, they resort to a different type of repetition, one that signals their inability to rationalize their decision. When the Indian man continues to reply with witty responses to the British man’s arguments, all the colonizer can do is repeat “No, No, it doesn’t, it doesn’t work like that! It doesn’t work like that” (Noah 4:23-4:27). Very similar phrases to a person throwing a temper tantrum. The colonizer falls back into a childish response to the argument due to his inability to justify the reason for colonization. The repetition of “no, no,” and “it doesn’t work like that,” prove that the British lack substance in their argument. They have

no justification for colonization. Instead, colonizer repeats comfort phrases that redirect their answers from addressing the true absurdity and ridiculousness of the problem.

The British man also tries to use religion as a statement of justification but ends up repeating the same phrase for every single question the Indian man asks. When the colonizer repeatedly repeats different versions of “his name is god,” he tries to establish authority, insisting the Indian must accept this version of religion (Noah 2:05 2:16-2:18 2:34-2:35 2:43). The repetition highlights the colonial desire to force the Indians to comply with their version of religion, submitting to the British authority. It also mocks the British attitude. Reducing India’s complex religious beliefs, the British expect their doctrines to be accepted without question. However, Noah satirizes the repetition here. He spins it so the repetition expresses the colonizer’s arrogance, and childishness. As the Indian man questions authority, the colonizer cannot respond with a logical argument as to why his god is called God and why his religion is fundamentally better than the Indian man’s. And when the colonizer cannot win an argument, he once again defaults to whining like a child, repeating the same phrase again and again. Noah’s use of repetition serves a dual purpose. He exposes the British for being unable to justify their words and how they resort to childish intellect to enforce their ideology.

Noah also uses Repartee to mock the British colonizer’s assumed authority, reversing the power dynamic. Through his witty responses, the Indian man embodies the mantra: Treat people the way you want to be treated. Talk to people the way you want to be talked to. Respect is earned, not given. An example is when the British man yells,

“How dare you speak to me like that! Do you know who I am?” to which the Indian man responds, “[n]o, because you never introduced yourself,” (Noah 3:25-3:33). This clever retort undermines the British authority in an instant. The British man’s assumed authority is mocked. Instead of responding with fear or appeasement, the Indian man uses his wit to deride the absurdity of the situation. Without even introducing himself, the egotistic British man starts to order and force people around. The Indian man turns their arrogance into ridicule, which angers the colonizer even more. His only justification for his arrogance? He is from Great Britain. This does not appease the Indian man.

Even before the British man can arrive at a logical conclusion as to why they called themselves great, the Indian man is already firing more sarcastic shots. “You called yourselves great? Isn’t that a little presumptuous? Shouldn’t you wait for other people to tell you how great you are, huh? Shouldn’t you just go around the world and just do good things, good things, good things... Then people go, ‘Oh my God, Britain, look how great you are,’” (Noah 3:41-4:08). The Indian man once again mocks the British’s thought of self-importance. He even directly calls out the British for being “presumptuous”. Noah depicts the Indian man mimicking the colonizer’s attempted justification of authority to indirectly imply that respect should be earned and not given. The inanity of the action is the self-assumed ‘greatness’ of Britain, a title that should be earned through actions and not religion. What is more absurd is that the Indian man even points out a solution where the British man can justify the naming of his own country. Instead, the colonizer declares, “I believe we could do it because we knew instinctively. We are Great Britain,” (Noah 4:14-4:17). Using repartee, the Indian man flips the same ideology onto him and retorts,

“Well, in that case, welcome to Great India,” (Noah 4:1-4:21). This witty remark flips the power dynamic of the conversation and suggests that if Britain can call themselves great without any evidence, then India can do the same. Again, this highlights the absurdity of the arrogance and ego of the British colonizer. Using the same unjustified logic, the Indian man quickly gains the upper hand in the conversation, reversing the power dynamic. Unlike the power balance that played out in history, the Indian man’s witty responses evened the playing field. Overall, Noah sprinkles repartee throughout his piece to mock the British Empire for their egotistical beliefs that center around a nonexistent structure.

Trevor Noah incorporates a variety of satirical devices such as jargon, repetition, and repartee throughout his talk show skit to mock the absurdity of the British Empire’s self-inflated ego and superiority as the colonizer attempts to justify the colonization of India. Ultimately, Noah’s satire serves to critique not just British colonialism, but the broader theme of assuming power without reason. A common problem in society today. This humorous satire serves as a reminder to always challenge power imbalances in history and the importance of justification behind actions.