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The Koh –i-Noor and its Post Colonial Ramifications

Sukhvinderjit Kaur Chopra

Lecturer,
Lovely Professional University.

Abstract:

Koh-i-Noor, the most famed diamond in the world, sits proudly in the Crown of the monarch, known to have had a kingdom in which the sun never set. And why not, theirs is one of the most powerful economies and they wield a say in major governing Bodies of the world. Nevertheless, how come one of the world's strongest nation's Royalty has a diamond from our country? How and why did it reach England? And if at all it's ours, why isn't it given back? This write-up answers these questions, and probably provides food for thought for others. Now as the realization has dawned that the colonization by the British took away our resources, some of our fellow citizens have taken the initiative to appeal for its return, even the Ministry of External Affairs is voicing the same. Whether we get it back or not, is unsure, however one thing is sure, our valuables and resources were forcibly taken away by the colonizers. And today, the major challenges faced by our country are an aftermath of colonization. With this awareness, we need to first take pride in own selves as a nation and work to build a society based on the heritage we possess instead of becoming a poor imitation of the West. The demand for the return of the diamond is post colonial as it was taken away during the era of colonization.

Keywords: Koh-i-Noor, robbed, demand, post colonial realization.

'A Golden Bird'. That's how our country was known to be. One wonders on this sobriquet, is it a myth? An emotional outburst eulogizing one's country, or a reality. In present times, the fact that even after seventy years of Independence we don't belong to the league of 'Developed Countries', makes it seem a myth but studying the history which describes the attack of invaders from Alexander to the Mughals and then the British, because of its material resources, it is a reality. The foreigners attack and later colonization by the British left India bereft of its riches and dignity. The vast number of researches and study on colonization and post colonization is a testimony to this fact. And in line with this concept is the recent brouhaha over the demand for the return of the magnificent diamond, 'Koh-i-Noor'. It adorns the British Monarch's Crown which is currently placed in the Tower of London. A study of the origin of the precious carbon is another proof that India's riches and rare artefacts are in the possession of the colonizers. Now that there is an awareness of this reality, the voices for its return are mounting. As per the article in *The Times of India*, a group of people comprising of businessmen and actors are raising a legal challenge against Queen Elizabeth-II, demanding its return. David de Souza, co-founder of Titos, a leisure group is funding this endeavour. He says "The 'Koh-i-Noor' is one of the many artefacts taken from India under dubious circumstances. Colonization did not only rob our people

of wealth, it destroyed the country's psyche itself. It brutalized society, traces of which linger on today in the form of mass poverty, lack of education and host of other factors". His views reiterate what academicians and experts have been mentioning.

The 'Koh-i-noor', once considered the largest uncut diamond weighing 739 carats, was mined in the medieval times in the Kollur Mine in Andhra Pradesh in Guntur district. Originally owned by the Kakatiya dynasty, which installed the diamond in a temple of Hindu goddess as her eye, was taken by the Khilji dynasty when they raided Warangal, and then it came to the Mughals when in 1526, Babur invaded India and established the Mughal Empire. In 1739, the diamond was snatched away by the Persian ruler Nadir Shah who supposedly gave it its current name, 'Koh-i-noor'. Nadir Shah took the diamond with him to Iran, where he was killed. In 1800, one of his grandsons, Shuja Shah escaped to Punjab along with it and sought Maharaja Ranjit Singh's help. Shuja Shah gave the diamond to the maharaja as a token of gratitude and it remained with the latter for thirty years. In 1849, after the second Anglo-Sikh war, the diamond was confiscated by the British and finally reached England in 1850. 'Koh-i-noor' sure has a very dramatic journey and a royal history. The demand for its return is very just and simultaneously has many connotations. One, the colonizers took away with them that was precious to a country. Be it wealth or dignity. They snatched the former and sullied the latter by propagating the colonized country in a very bad light. Fanon, in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, mentions the same. Achebe too, in the foreword of *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, says that the natives were presented by their colonial masters in a derogatory manner. Two, it makes one wonder, can the erstwhile biggest diamond of the world exist in a poor country? It only shows how wealthy our nation was at one point of time. And the demand for its return symbolizes the demand to return the prestige, which was forcibly taken away because of the coercive tactics of the colonizers.

The article in *The Hindustan Times* elucidates the history of the diamond quite similar to as mentioned above. It also reiterates the myths associated with the Kohinoor, first that it be possessed with women only as it is a curse for men, and second that the owner of this precious diamond would own the world. The second myth probably could have been the reason of the fight for its ownership.

Yet another article in *The Tribune*, states that the Punjab State Government and the SGPC (Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandhak Committee) would join the legal battle as they believe the matter is close to the Sikh psyche. According to this article, the diamond has a mythological history as it is believed to be spotted on the forehead of an abandoned infant on the banks of river Yamuna. And this infant was none other than Karna, the son of Vedic Sun God. Further it is believed the stone originally weighed over 600 carats and was tied to the statue of Shiva over the third eye. The story of the diamond in the Crown of British Empire is told through leaflets, brochures and books and it mentions its history from the times of Mahabharata to when it came to the East India Company. The Literature further says that the diamond was first possessed by the King of Malwa and later appeared in the treasury of Babur. The information also mentions

that the 'Koh-i-noor', is believed to be a curse to the men who possessed it and the British ensured that only women wear it.

One of the columns in *The Tribune* dated 23 rd July, says that the government of India is likely to approach the Government of England to get the 'Koh-i-noor', back. And this decision was taken by External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, Cultural Minister, Mahesh Sharma and Cabinet Secretary PK Sinha. Mention worthy is there is a possibility of a treaty with the UK, that India would not ask for the return of any other artefact other than the Kohinoor.

The outcome of the demand for Koh-i-Noor's return is unclear, only time would tell. However the demand for its return tells a lot. It says our country was wealthy, so much so that the wealth attracted foreigners. The biggest diamond cannot be in a country which is poor, it is found where there are innumerable other diamonds and obviously it was not just Koh-i-Noor that the colonizers took away from them. If they have our biggest diamond, they surely do have other artefacts, jewels and our money. The prospective treaty between UK and India, for the latter not demanding any more artefacts signals a strong probability that they do possess our valuables but are apprehensive of our stand as, if we demand Koh-i-Noor today, we may ask for more of them in future. The insistence for the return of this precious diamond is symbolic too. The colonized country wants its dignity back, which was robbed and cruelly snatched. It proves, the natives have developed the maturity to understand the true situation as it is, the way the British screwed domination upon us exploiting our lacunas.

Assuming, the diamond is returned, will not suffice. The damage done to the psyche of the colonized is to be taken care of. The demand to return Koh-i-Noor is the realization that we were a prosperous nation and the masses need to be educated in order to appreciate our rich heritage. The systems of governance and education established by the British are still followed where as they need to be changed to cater to the requirements of our country and culture, otherwise we are just another market for the West.

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