

The colonized and colonizer Women: A Comparative Study of A Passage to India and Heart of Darkness

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Abstract

The theory of feminism highlights the plight of women and allows the readers to analyze their role in the social set ups. This study focuses on the comparative analyses of women during the colonial period as observed by Conrad and Forster. Their creative works; *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* are considered as core texts for comparative analysis. The texts highlight the socio-economical discrimination meted out to women in the colonial period. The philosophy of equal status with equal rights and powers for women has not given due importance. The colonized woman is depicted as poverty-stricken who is in the clutches of exploitation, oppression and victim of mysticism, claustrophobic, impressionism, hallucination, superiority complex and superstitions. Both Conrad and Forster painted characters whose verbal strategies intriguing tactics to dominate the colonized. The main focus of this research paper is on the comparison and contrast on different levels of colonized and colonizer women. The core objective is that the colonizing strategies are counter-productive, violating basic human rights of women in such a way as to create long term negative impacts. The women are not given any proper treatment in the texts and none of the female character is of central focus. They are painted as dependent, victim, gloomy and bereaved. The main focus of Forster in the text about the women is that the colonizer women are arrogant and the colonized women are ignorant.

Key Words: Colonialism, Feminism, Characters, Characterization, Comparative Analysis.

Introduction

Joseph Conrad and E. M. Forster conceived innovative themes in their works and thus broke away from the dominant paradigms of Victorianism. They put their creative efforts to the Heroic Age of the modern novel. In the words of Abrams, “The years of 1912 to 1930 were the Heroic Age of the modern novel, the age of Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, D. H Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and E.M Forster” (Abrams, 1993, p. 1687). Conrad and Forster criticize social fragmentation and advocate social unity, social democratic norms and cultural values. As modernists, they replace the trend of set story with a focal question in their novels. They also have explicitly and implicitly put their point of views about feminism and the issues of women in the novels have the colonial settings. This study has focused on the representation of the colonized and colonizer women in *A Passage to India* and *Heart of Darkness*.

Methodology

The research method is qualitative and analytical and is carried out into two phases. In the first phase, the texts *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* are studied for the identification of the issues of female characters and their characterization. The collected portion of discourse about the female characters, in both the texts, is comparatively analyzed in the second phase. The analysis is considered in the light of relevant critical study from various dimensions. The comparative study in the texts, reflects the strategies of the both the writers about the female characters and their representation. The core points of consideration are:

- How the colonized and the colonizer female characters are presented
- The colonial attitude of the female characters in the colonies; during the colonial period

The irony of fact is that the female individuals, from the communities (colonized and colonizers) are not aware of the logical consequences of their attitude. This is the focus point, analyzed through comparative judgment.

Review of the Relevant Literature

Feminist theory is the study of literature through the perspective of women and their issues. The main focus is on the identity of women; their rights and social status. Thus feminist theory offers critiques of male-centered modes of thought and often concentrates its attentions upon female

authors and the experiences of women. Literary critics, in their critiques, have entered into the debate about the depiction of women characters in *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* from various dimensions. Thus these texts have been viewed and reviewed through feministic critical theory.

A Passage to India reflects the arrogant attitude of the colonizers in colonized India. The contact or relationship, among various communities, was quite unnatural for interaction and communication. The major obstacle between the communities was colonialism. Abu Bakar (2006) confirms this fact and states that the main theme of *A Passage to India* is that friendship between the English and the Indians as colonizer and colonized is not possible. The theme of the novel is the relation of the colonizers and colonized and the indifferent attitude of the ruling race. Abrahams (1994) observes that Forster takes the relations between the English and the Indians in India in the early decades of twentieth century. Forster observes that the irresponsible attitude of the British colonizers divides the Indian communities into further segments. The aggressive behaviour and disaffection among the communities create a social split. Before the arrival of the colonizers, the Indians were living quite peacefully; the racial disintegration among the Indian communities is caused by the colonialism.

In *A Passage to India*, the women characters are presented quite briefly and superficially and their role is quite limited and restricted. Majority of them have certain flaws, for instance, Mrs Moore is mystic and claustrophobic, Adela Quested is impressionistic and hallucinated, Mrs Turton, Mrs Callendar and Miss Derek have a sense of superiority complex, Begum Hamidullah believes in superstitions, Mrs Bhattacharya is diplomatic and doesn't like to fulfill her promise. With the exception of Mrs Moore and Adela Quested, the rest of English female characters are arrogant and hate the colonized. The women characters are without proper names; for instance Begum Hamidullah, Mrs Bhattacharya, the wife of Aziz, the wife of Muhammad Latif, Mrs Das, Mrs Turton and Mrs Callendar. Some of them have been identified with adjectives, not with their names like the shorter ladies, the taller ladies.

Forster observes that the Indian women (Colonized) are not independent in decision making and cannot raise their voice against any injustice. They are not progressive or politically aware of their importance and even their protest and resistance don't make any difference. They have to remain inside the houses according to the Indian traditions which confirm the theory of G.C. Spivak of double colonization. They are kept in clutches by their men, the Indian traditions and

the colonial system. Forster criticizes the Indians that in the past they didn't encourage their women to play a progressive and dynamic role. He argues that in India the women have been constantly ignored. Owing to this fact, the Indians; particularly the Muslims became weak with the passage of time. He has given the example the battle at Plassey (1757) which was a decisive battle between the British East India Company and Nawab of Bengal. Had the women put their efforts in this battle, then the consequences would have been different with a different history. Similarly, Forster argues the Indian woman is a victim of superstition. He has given the example of Begum Hamidullah who repeatedly asks Dr Aziz for the second marriage and is quite worried about the girls who are not married so far. However, the question of second marriage irritates and annoys Dr Aziz and Hamidullah (her husband) who scolds her for asking such question. This is quite natural for the Orientals as well as Occidental to mention the names of the females in the last. The obvious examples are the names of Aziz's children (Two boys and their sister) and the names of the children of Mrs Moore (Ronny Heaslop, Ralph Moore and Stella Moore). Forster informs the readers that the Indian women don't know the manners of interaction or socialization. For instance, at Bridge Party, they are assembled in a corner of the summer-house with their backs to the rest of the people. They are depicted as shy and timid and compared with colourful birds and colored swallows. The overall situation at the Bridge Party is quite bewildering for the Indian ladies. They are uncertain, cowering, recovering, giggling, making tiny gestures of atonement or despair. The Indian women are criticized as they put the burden of their lives upon the others. For instance, like her husband, the wife of Muhammad Latif is living with her relatives hundreds of miles away from her husband. He does not visit his wife owing to the expense of the railway ticket and other expenditures.

The colonizer women (English) are proud, haughty, arrogant and don't like to communicate and socialize with the Indians. Mrs Turton refuses to receive the Indian guests at the Bridge Party. Her remarks about the Indians are quite derogatory as she thinks the English and Indian women hate each other and don't like to mix up during the gatherings. She observes, "Why they come at all I don't know. They hate it as much as we do" (Forster, 1991, p. 33). Mrs Turton reminds Mrs Moore that the English ladies are superior, "You're superior to them. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they're on an equality" (Forster, 1991, p. 33). So an ordinary colonizer woman is depicted as equal to the Indian Ranis. However, the reason of superiority is not mentioned. When some of the Indian ladies inform Mrs Moore that they had

been to London and even Paris; they are snubbed by Mrs Turton and responds to them sarcastically that they had passed Paris on the way, as if she was describing the movements of migratory birds. She does not like to see them at a par with the English, “Her manner had grown more distant since she had discovered that some of the group was westernized, and might apply her own standards to her” (Forster, 1991, p. 33). The English have a sense of superiority complex and consider it against their dignity to come close to the Indian women for interaction and conversation. Consequently, Adela Quested and Mrs Moore could not talk to the Indian women at the Bridge Party. The English women are quite critical, oversensitive and have an eye on each other. Forster has written about the disaffection and misunderstanding among them. Adela Quested quite openly criticizes the behaviour of English people and considers them ‘mad’. The other English ladies criticize Adela Quested for her desire to see the real India. They also have a close eye on each other. Ronny points out to her mother that when Adela went out to the boundary of the club compound and Fielding followed her; Mrs Callendar noticed it. Turton states that Adela is not a pukka, meaning not the sort the English women should be. However, when she is in trouble after the Marabar incident, Mrs Turton sympathizes with her and declares Adela Quested as her own darling girl. She laments on her own remarks when she had called her “not pukka”. Her weeping and crying seems very strange to the other people as no one had ever seen “the Collector's wife cry”. The members of the ruling group change their attitude after their arrival to a colonized country. This altered attitude is the main reason of tension. The attitude, behaviour and prejudice have a close link with each other and can be explained in the light of psychoanalysis.

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad has mentioned an unnamed European company that controls and usurps the natural production of ivory in the African Congo. The Headquarters of the company is in Brussels and the nature of trade is the exploration of ivory from a colonized state (Congo), through the colonized Congolese. They are made slaves and controlled with brutal force. Raskin considers the text a criticism on the attitude of the colonialists in African Congo. He states, “(It) is a study of the Congo and the conquest of the European whites. It is an impression of the civilizing methods of a European Trading Company” (Raskin, 1967, p. 113). The main focus of the text is on the struggle and rivalry of the colonizers of various nations in the colonized African Congo for ivory. In this struggle the colonialists lose their civilized values and become savages. Kurtz is one of them who were initially a notable writer, journalist, intellectual, painter, and the champion of the human rights. But the pursuit for ivory turns him a savage and cruel person. The company assigns

the responsibility to captain Marlow to bring Kurtz back to the civilized world. Svensson and Falk (2010) state that the text deals with Marlow's expedition into the African jungle in search of Mr Kurtz, an ivory trader, to bring him back to European's civilization. However, Mr Kurtz does not want to go back and orders an attack on the steamboat when they get close to his station. Somehow Marlow reaches to his station and puts him in a steamer to bring him back to Brussels. Since Kurtz has become extremely weak, therefore, on the way back he dies with last words the horror, the horror and Marlow comes back without him. After his arrival, Marlow visits Mr. Kurtz's fiancé and gives her Kurtz's old letters. She remembers him as a great man and is still in love with him. She is quite keen to know about his last words before death. Though the last words of Mr Kurtz were the horror, the horror, however, Marlow tells her a lie and replies that his last word was her name.

In *Heart of Darkness* the colonizer and colonized females are mentioned with marital references; they don't have their names. For instance:

- Marlow's aunt
- Kurtz's native lover or fiancé (Intendant)
- Kurtz's African Mistress
- The knitting women
- Kurtz's mother

Ironically, the physical exploration towards Inner Station is accelerated, unconsciously, by a woman. A woman (Marlow's aunt) helps Charlie Marlow to get a job. In the words of Hinkle, "Women are silent, and frequently disdained by the paternalistic narrator who admits to not really understanding the "world" that women live in" (Hinkle, 2007, p. 1). Thus Marlow's aunt has been depicted as a supporter of colonialism. Marlow then comes across with women, for the prescribed formalities, before departure. The two women present at the company Headquarters are knitting black wool. The first one, who is comparatively young, moves here and there in the office and guiding the visitors and introducing them with the other officials. The second one is without any responsibility; she is just sitting on a chair and observing the situation. Here their presence is symbolic; the knitting of the black wool is a symbol of preparing the policies against the black people in this building. The next destination, from the headquarters, is the Outer Station. Here, only one silent black woman is present. The spotless white dress of the Chief Accountant is owing

to this black colonized mute woman. She has been trained, by the chief accountant, for the job. However, the reality is that she is in the control of the chief accountant and has been made a slave. This behaviour reflects the attitude of the colonizers and their hypocrisy about the women particularly the colonized women. The claim of the chief accountant is that he is teaching her some values and customs of the civilized colonizers. At the Central Station, the presentation of women is only in painting (Kurtz's fiancé). The sketch was painted by Kurtz when he was proceeding to the Inner Station. The painting is a small sketch in oils, and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The painting is again a symbol which reflects the mentality and thinking of the colonizers about women. The painting is now lying in the room of the brickmaker, who informs Marlow that the woman in the painting is Kurtz's fiancée in Europe.

The two female characters, a colonized and colonizer are present in the last part of the text. However, they do not influence the main theme of the story. Ridley (1963) in his research paper, 'The Ultimate Meaning of Heart of Darkness' states that the two women represent the opposing forces; these opposing forces control Kurtz. The one is savagery, wild and dark, the other is faith, glowing, fair, symbol of just such a power of devotion. Both the colonizer and colonized women are victims of colonialism. Though their location is different, their agony is the same. The black African woman is without any language. She is speaking grants and short phrases sounding like a 'violent babble'. The colonizer woman is depicted civilized and cultured; however, she is unaware of dark soul and dark deeds of the White men (white chauvinism). Both of them are attributed to Kurtz, Kurtz's Intended and Kurtz's African Mistress. They are unaware of each other:

- The first is living at Brussels
- The other at the Inner Station at Congo.

Their detailed depictions are in part III of the novella. The main features are their bereavement and sufferings. They are not aware of their fate and just attributed themselves to Kurtz. The description and other features of the colonized and colonizer women are given in table:

Table

A Comparison of the Colonized and Colonizer women in *Heart of Darkness*

| Colonized woman | Colonizer woman |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is depicted as savage with wild-eyed. Her physique is very sound and magnificent. • She wears multicolour clothes with a lot of spots on it. • She is decorated with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments (brass wire gauntlets, a crimson spot on tawny cheek, and innumerable necklaces of glass beads). • Her hair is in the shape of a helmet. • She is a mere statue. • She can't speak, doesn't utter a single word. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is in black, with a pale head, fair hair, pure brow and dark eyes. • Her appearance is quite gloomy with a sorrowful head. However, she is proud of it. • She is a strong believer and accepts every word of Marlow about Kurtz. Marlow quite easily deceives her and tells her a lie about Kurtz. She still has great respect and love for Kurtz. • Her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in glamour of gold. • She praises Kurtz and his qualities. • She wants to live with his memory |

Achebe (1978) criticizes the way Conrad presents the African women in the text and states that in the last section of the text, Conrad has written about an African woman however, all the details about her are out of place. Her only importance is that she has remained mistress to Mr. Kurtz in Congo. Achebe states that the character of the African woman (Kurtz's African Mistress) has no importance in the story. The impression that she has a hold over Kurtz holds no water. Her symbolic presence is to fulfill a structural requirement of the story. She is a savage counterpart of the European woman (Kurtz fiancé) who is depicted as refined, charming, devoted and a true lover who is still waiting for Kurtz. In Achebe's opinion the African woman is depicted as belonging to the other world. Achebe observes that the colonized woman is without any language. His point holds water; however, Conrad has put body language in her character. Her expression conveys what she wants to say. Her coming close to Marlow, The Russian Trader and the rest of the people illustrates that she wants to convey her feelings through gloomy face, tragic and wild sorrow. The feelings were tragic and fierce; however, the unconscious fear and sorrow are added to her gloom and seriousness. Her expressions reflect her sorrow and grief to the people. Her grief and gloom

are quite tragic and deep and even can kill her. However, she does not like to give up and wants to show her strength in such a situation.

Data Analysis

Memmi (1974) has classified the colonizer characters into two categories; the colonizers who accept and those who reject or refuse. The English women in *A Passage to India* can be classified accordingly. The English women who accept colonialism are Mrs Turton, Mrs Callander, Miss Derek and Miss Lesley; however, Adela Quested and Mrs Moore refuse to follow the colonial attitude. Comparatively, the colonizer females quickly change their attitude “within six months” in a colonized state. They are also responsible for the corruption; and they are arrogant with a sense of superiority. Mrs Lesely and Mrs Callander take the tonga hired by Aziz without any courtesy and gratitude. At the occasion of Bridge Party, Mrs Turton doesn't like to go to welcome the Indian women on the pretext that these women prefer Purdah. However, Adela observes that Indians are guests so they should be attended by the British. This colonial attitude has inculcated hatred in the hearts of the colonized. In *A Passage to India*, the attitude and control of the English women has been criticized. Forster observes that the Englishmen had intended to play better, but had been prevented from doing so by their womenfolk. Mrs Turton does not like to socialize with the colonized subaltern. She thinks that the colonized women should come to greet her. Even she refuses to shake hands with any of the men, unless it happens to be the Nawab Bahadur. Mrs Turton informs Mrs Moore that she is superior to everyone in India. She makes fun of those Indian ladies who could speak English and had been abroad. She compares them with migratory birds.

Adela Quested remains confused at various occasions. After the incident of Marabar Caves, Adela is depicted as insane. She remains absorb in her thinking and murmuring to herself the words without any sense and meanings. Adela is a stranger to McBryde but they have sympathy for her, “Both Mrs McBryde and Miss Derek kissed her, and called her by her Christian name” (Forster, 1991, p. 178). Ronny Heaslop criticizes the religious and humane attitude of his mother and Mr Turton put the blame of his weak administration on the women, “After all, it's our women who make everything more difficult here” (Forster, 1991, p. 193). The power and importance of a colonizer woman is, “From the moment of his arrest he was done for, he had dropped like a wounded animal; he had despaired, not through cowardice, but because he knew that an Englishwoman's word would always outweigh his own” (Forster, 1991, p. 212). The heroism and

courage of a young colonizer is appreciated. Adela is depicted as a brave English girl. When she saw she was wrong, she withdraws all her accusations against Dr Aziz. After the trial Fielding brings Adela to his residence, this creates misunderstanding between Aziz and Fielding. Aziz considers that Fielding wants to marry Adela Quested. This misunderstanding is one of the reasons of their separation. However, Fielding realizes the situation and highlights the character of Adela. However, she faces consequences for her sincerity and honesty. The colonial attitude does not like such courage, “Poor lamentable Adela remained at Government College, by Fielding's courtesy - unsuitable and humiliating, but no one would receive her at the civil station” (Forster, 1991, p. 233). She was left alone, and went back England with a broken heart. However, she remembers the kindness of Fielding. She introduces Fielding with Stella Moore and makes arrangements for their marriage. Fielding accepts her role as a facilitator and spends happy life with Stella.

The psychological phenomenon hallucination is also inserted in the text. Hallucination, as explained by Harris (1973) is a phenomenon produced by extreme stress, wherein what was once experienced externally (derogation, rejection, and criticism) is again experienced externally, even though “no one is there” and nothing has happened. A recorded experience “comes on for real” and the person “hears” voices that exist in the past. If you ask him what the voices say, he characteristically will describe the content as words of criticism, threat, or violence. Adela becomes a victim of hallucination after the Marabar Caves incident. Harris considers hallucination a psychological factor owing to extreme stress. The major conflict is due to the mental condition of Adela Quested. She was engrossed in deep thinking. People seemed very much alike, except that some would come close while others kept away. Adela Quested during her treatment informs the doctor and other fellows that she entered into that cave (Marabar) and started scratching the wall with her finger-nail, to start the usual echo, and then there was a shadow, or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel. She hit that shadow with the glasses, he pulled her round the cave by the strap, it broke and she ran away from there and thus escaped. The psychological experience of Marabar caves is different for the visitors. Koponen (1993) states that Adela is terrified by her feelings, which blend in her mind with the echo. The echo leaves her only after she confesses at the trial that she was mistaken. With this release from the echo comes a newfound resignation to the limits of knowledge and words. Following the trial, Adela finds herself “at the end of her spiritual tether”. Similarly, Aziz distorts the truth to maintain the right feeling. He lies to Adela

that his wife is alive and she can see her at home. However, her hallucination takes her away. Her coldness disorients her as she enters a cave in the Marabar, pondering love and realizing she does not love her fiancé. Her feelings at the entering of the caves are very strange. Upon entering the cave, Adela becomes unhinged, suggesting a rejection of sexual union.

Conrad observes that the colonizers keep women in darkness with 'white truth'. The white truth is to exclude the women from the reality which is expressed through the principal narrator, Marlow, who admits that the women are living in a world of their own. It implies that the women do not like to share their views with the men. Marlow considers it quite strange that they don't interfere or ask about the reality of the matters. Upon his return from Congo, Marlow visits Kurtz's fiancé to hand over a packet of letters to her. His visit is after a period of one year, but he observes that she is still in black and mourns the death of Kurtz. She is living with a broken heart and is keen to listen to every word about Kurtz. Ridley (1963) makes an analysis of the last meeting between Marlow and Kurtz's fiancé and adds that Kurtz turns away from the Belgian girl and never gives her a name. She remains his 'Intended'. His last words are not her name. Marlow does remain faithful to the Intended, protecting her from further agony and shock. He tells her a lie. She is talking about Kurtz- his qualities, his merits, his achievements, his struggle and her voice is full of sorrow. She considers his death a tragic loss for the whole world. Her remorse is that she was not with him at the time of his death. In the opinion of Murfin (2007) the scene of meeting between Marlow and Kurtz fiancé is quite tragic and most memorable. In this scene the true picture of a colonizer male and his hypocritical nature is exposed. The effect of the scene on male and female readers is different. The readers are reminded that this is a tale which is concerned with a kind of mainstream male experience. The women are out of it and have been deliberately hidden and kept from the reality. In *Heart of Darkness* women are silent; their role is marginalized, and frequently disdained by the paternalistic narrator who admits to not really understanding the world that women live in.

The women are not given any proper treatment in the texts and none of the female character is of central focus. They are painted as dependent, victim, gloomy and bereaved. A brief comparative analysis reveals that:

- Mrs. Moore is mystic and socially divided (RonneyHeaslop is in India, Ralph and Estela in England)
- Mrs Moore is intolerable, sensitive and vulnerable to Indian weather

- Her humane, humble and civilized character is termed as oriental
- Miss Derek's stay in Chandrapore is scandalized (Her relations with the police officer McBryde)
- Miss Adela Quested is a hallucinated figure and is impressionable, not *Pukka*
- She is sent back to England with a broken heart, a failure in love and future life. During the crisis, Adela Quested is implanted and exploited by the British Raj, as a whip for the colonized, however, left alone, when she reveals the real truth. Her fear of conversion from English into Anglo-Indian is also marked a psychological ailment (schizophrenia).
- Marlow's aunt is depicted as a supporter of colonialism.
- Kurtz's fiancée is the unnamed woman who is present in the form of painting and only appears in the last section of the novel. She stays in Brussels (Belgium) and is an image of light and heaven for consolation.
- The colonized woman, Kurtz's African mistress is depicted as the antithesis of the colonizer woman, Kurtz intended, without any language.

Conclusion

The study of the texts reveals that women characters are not treated with proper importance and equality. Their socio-economic status has not been given any prominence; rather it reflects the picture of the Victorian woman who was kept in darkness with white truth. The women in both the texts are in the clutches of men for exploitation and oppression. They are victims of mysticism, claustrophobia, impressionism, hallucination, superiority complex and superstitions. The strategies adopted by the colonizers were counter-productive, violating basic human rights of women in such a way as to create long term negative impacts on the societies. None of the female character is of central focus and they are painted as dependent, victim, gloomy and bereaved. The main focus of Conrad and Forster in the texts about the women is that the colonizer women are

arrogant and the colonized women are ignorant. In *A Passage to India*, Forster has narrated that the colonizers inculcate a fright in the colonized which is reflected in the characters and situations. Forster has given examples of the relation of the colonized and colonizers and states that the women of the ruling group used to change their attitude after their arrival to a colonized state. Forster argues that this changed attitude, in the other countries, is a part of the nature of the English people. The Conradian women are living in fear and are victims of white truth. The mouthpiece of Conrad is the principal narrator Marlow who says that women are out of touch with truth and on this basis the critics have termed Conrad as a sexist. There are a number of feminist critics who attack Conrad for ignoring the role of women. Nina Pelikan Straus, Bette London, Johanna M. Smith, and Elaine Showalter were among those who claimed that *Heart of Darkness* is not only imperialist but also sexist. Comparatively, the treatment of the female characters in *A Passage to India* is more progressive than *Heart of Darkness*.

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