Bhowani Junction (by John Masters):
A Colonialist Narrative of the Celebration of British Superiority

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Abstract:
Europeans and British regard their own culture, ideology, race, civilization, arts and artifacts as superior and the non-European cultures and races as inferior. Other, especially those cultures and races which were under their political and military subjugation during the days of imperialism. This is reflected in the writings of the Europeans. John Masters is a British novelist and has written many novels about British India. The present study intended to undertake the critical study of Bhowani Junction and show that Masters has portrayed British colonialists, their ideology, race and culture as superior, and has portrayed India and Indians in it as inferior Other. The present study was based upon Post Colonial theories especially that of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. The study found that John Masters has portrayed the British and their culture as superior, while the Indians and their culture are portrayed as lesser and inferior. The study further showed that in spite of mimicry and hybridity of identity on the part of natives, they were not accepted as equals.

Key Words: Eurocentrism; margin; cultural; hybrid; discourse; imperialism; stereotype; constructs

I. Introduction
John Masters (1914--1983), a British novelist, born in colonial India, has written twenty three novels; many of these are about India. Some of these are Nightrunners of Bengal (1951), The Deceivers (1952) and Bhowani Junction (1983). In these novels, especially in Bhowani Junction he has presented the British along with their race, culture and civilization as superior and the local Indians, their culture and civilization as inferior other. The British characters occupy the center position in the novel, while the Indians exist at the margins and that too as negative stereotypes. This is meant to perpetuate and reinforce the image of the British as superiors, and as selfless saviours of India and Indians. This also is to justify the presence of the British in India as the only true force that can guarantee peace and progress for the Indians. This is a classic example of what Martin Green (1979) calls literature in the service of the Raj. It was Edward Said, who
with his books, Orientalism (2001), and Culture and Imperialism (1994) exposed the true nature of this relationship and the role of literature in it. Frantz Fanon had earlier expressed similar views about the encounter between the colonialist and the colonized (2008), especially with reference to mimicry and imitation by the colonized of the culture of the colonialists. The present study is an exercise to examine all these issues with reference to the portrayal of Indians and India by John Masters in his novel Bhowani Junction. The study is to become a Contrapuntal or newly activated and re-informed reading of the selected novel as suggested by Said (1994).

II. Literature Review

_Bhowani Junction_ has been reviewed by critics mainly from the perspective of the Eurasians. Ralph j, Crane (1992) has examined the novel from this perspective. He has highlighted the difficulties experienced by the Eurasians just before independence. Their plight is not very different from that of the Parsees portrayed by Sidhwa (1989, 1990) in her novels. Dr. Khittak (1987), in his Ph. D. dissertation has dealt with Master's craftsmanship and themes and the identity issues experienced by the Eurasians. He has dwelt upon the portrayal of India and Indians by Masters, but not from the postcolonial perspective. Soonha Abro (Dawn, 19. 10. 20012) has also examined the novel mainly from the angle of the identity crises confronted by the Eurasians, and has said nothing on the superior portrayal of the British and the negative reflection of the Indians in the novel. The present study intends to fill these gaps by examining the novel in the light of postcolonial critical theory. This establishes the significance of the study.

III. The Research Methodology:

The research methodology for the present study is to be the exhaustive analysis of the text of _Bhowani Junction_ in the light of Postcolonial Critical theories. The study is to find the answers to the following research questions, designed in the light of suggestions given by Tyson (2006), and then come up with its findings:

i) How does the text represent the various aspects of the colonial culture and ideology?

ii) How does it portray the issues of identity?

iii) How does it portray the anti-colonialist resistance?

iv) How does it portray the cultures of the colonized and the attitude of the colonized towards their own culture and the culture of the colonisers?

v) Does it reinforce or undermine the colonialist ideology of superiority?

The major assumption of the study is that Masters has projected and reinforced the colonialist ideology of superiority especially through the character of Colonel Savage. He has also presented the Indians and the Anglo-Indians as inferior stereotypes. This makes _Bhowani Junction_ a typical colonial discourse, which is to serve as an apparatus of power
in order to justify and perpetuate the colonial systems of administration and instruction, in other words imperialism.

Discussion and Analysis:

IV. Portrayal of the British (Col. Savage) and of their Culture of superiority:

There are several British characters in the novel. Masters has portrayed the British superior in every sense of the word. The Indians and Anglo-Indians mimic them to gain their acceptance. The British live in cantonment, away and apart from the Indians and the Anglo-Indians.

Colonel Rodney Savage is the protagonist of the novel. He is thirty four and appears on the scene as sure of himself as a tiger. Later on in the novel he kills a tiger, while on an hunting expedition, to prove that he is even superior to a living tiger. He has presence. He is portrayed as a natural leader, who knows his job and knows how to get things done. He brooks no resistance and is coded to dismantle every barrier in the path of victory.

He is portrayed as a thorough gentleman. He is one exception to the general rule. He treats the father of Victoria Jones, a subaltern under his command, with respect and dignity and calls him sir, though he is only an engine driver. Words spoken by him carry weight. He cannot take tea if it is not served to his soldiers (54). He understands the several languages spoken by his soldiers. He is familiar with the culture of his men. He knows India and Indian geography, history and culture (292).

Savage is invariably the first in the line of duty. He is very tough and hardy and can withstand tropical heat and hunger, till the completion of his task. He can neutralize Patrick in the middle of his shooting at the Indians with only an inkpot (235). During campaigns, he can eat stale chupattis as if they were his favourite food. To him night and day are the same. When on missions and campaigns, he does not care either for his body or appearance. Like a true soldier, he is too much involved and absorbed in his profession. His reflexes are very sharp and he can use even darkness to his advantage, like a shikari, a photographer or a leopard. To his soldiers, he is like a father. He snubs his onetime sweet heart, for being rude to his Gurkha orderly Birkhe, when he is hurt in an incident, involving Indians. It is the only time Savage is shown losing his temper. He hugs and pats his orderly. He is portrayed as the ultimate representative of the metropolitan European culture. He knows no fear. He remains cool even when Taylor aims his pistol at him. Savage goes forward and takes hold of the loaded pistol by its muzzle, while the attacker runs away (304). He returns the still loaded pistol to its owner, who is so depressed and demoralized that he thinks of committing suicide. Savage represents self-confidence and certainty, while Taylor, a half-Indian and a complete mimic man, stands for uncertainty. He is portrayed as an upright man, a man of quality,
who never resorts to deception even when women are involved. He is portrayed as a man of principle. He himself follows the rules he has framed for his officers and men. He is portrayed as a true and romantic lover of Victoria. He can rise above the considerations of race, colour and class for his love. He is portrayed as a gallant, chivalrous and a patriarchal man. He finally kills the terrorist K. P. Roy. It is very symbolic. Masters suggests that India and Indians need the British to defeat the terrorists like Roy. Only British have the resolve and the will to kill such terrorists and restore peace to India. But this is nothing more than nostalgia. Masters has portrayed the British in the same way in his novel The Deceivers (1952).

The British are portrayed with their imperial life style. Mrs. Dickson arrives at Bhowani in first class compartment. She is accompanied by an ayah. She brings her huge paraphernalia that Europeans travel with. Bedding rolls, ice boxes, chilumchis, thermos flasks, suitcases, servants' tin boxes, kia Ora bottles, two bull terriers, soda water bottles, hurricane lanterns and so on (236). At Bhowani her bungalow is in perfect shape, with its bearers, baths and drinks.

V. Portrayal of the Indians as Inferior Stereotypes (terrorists, conspirators, incompetent and confused people):

The Indians are portrayed as inferior stereotypes. Their culture, life style and even their political leadership are made fun of and mocked at in the novel. Patrick Taylor, an Anglo-Indian narrator, says that thousands of Indians live in the city of Bhowani, packed like sardines. Bhowani is a railway town. The railway staff consists of the Anglo-Indians, while the Indians form the crew. They are called the Wogs, both by the British and the Anglo-Indians. The Indians are portrayed as un-cultured and un-civilised people. Patrick contends that the Indians are filthy, dirty, savages, and cowards (230). They smoke filthy bidi, chew beetle and are smelly. Patrick calls them some times as black bastards. The Indians are portrayed as shouting, eating while sitting on the stones, and are given to yelling at the slightest provocation. They are portrayed as with no sense of personal hygiene and can urinate in the open. The Indians are considered below the usual politeness and curtesy. Even Miss Jones, who is apparently sympathetic towards Indians and India, associates the Indians with third class compartments, pea nut shells and beetle juice (273).

Taylor in imitation of the British, abuses the Indians as a routine. For him, the Pathoda station master Bansy Lal is only a fat fool. Similarly, Kasel, the Sikh assistant of Patrick is portrayed as a man with suspicious connections. Patrick calls him a cheeky beggar. The father of Victoria reminds her that the Indians wash their behinds with their hands, and then eat their food with the same hand. He also tells her that she shakes the same hand. Her father is a true mimic man and has internalized the ideology of
superiority of the British. He is horrified at the thought of his daughter adopting an Indian life style and ending up in marriage with an Indian Sikh, Kasel.

Kartar Singh is another Indian character. He is a union leader of the railway employees. He is not portrayed different. Masters has portrayed him almost as an agent of the British. Savage uses Victoria to extract information from Kartar Singh.

Surabhai, the local Congress leader, is also not free from the influence of mimicry and hybridity. He wears a collar and tie and a European coat along with Gandhi cap and dhoti. He wears socks and sock-suspenders. He is portrayed as a ridiculous man, who gets excited and walks like a dancer and acts like a boxer. Savage makes his men to urinate on Surabhai and other Indians to get the railway tracks vacated. This shows the attitude of Masters and that of the British towards Indians. Even then Surabhai is shown coming to the same Savage and Govindaswami for the redressal of his complaint. He is portrayed as a man with no self-respect and dignity. No postcolonial writer has ever portrayed such a situation. Victoria admits that Savage played games of cat and mice with the Indians. Surabhai is persistently portrayed as a man who is in touch with the British, and is shown as visiting secretly the Collector. This is why Gowindha swami, the Collector maintains that there is an arrangement with the Congress for every single activity. Master has tried to present the genuine resistance movement of Congress as pretence. This is a distorted portrayal of the history. Narayan, a postcolonial Indian writer (2000) has celebrated the struggle of Congress and Gandhi for freedom and independence. He has portrayed Gandhi as Mahatma. Even the independent writers like Collin (1975) have never suggested such a thing.

Gandhi is referred to as little sanctimonious bastard, and is blamed for the troubles of 1942. His philosophy of non-violence is made fun of and held responsible for derailments and arson, through Patrick (32). Even the mother of Kasel is portrayed as abusing Gandhi. Savage ridicules the valiant struggle of Gandhi. The British and the Anglo-Indians blame the Indians and Congress in the plural for everything that goes wrong, from train derailments to acts of sabotage (20).

Govindhaswami is the Indian collector of Bhowani district. In 1946 it has become possible. He is a completely mimic man. Masters has created him as an illustration of Fanon's seminal text on mimicry and the relationship between culture and imperialism (2008). He uses white powder to mask his blackness. He speaks English with perfect Oxford accent, for he has been to England, Cheltenham and Balliol for education. During his stay there he changed his worlds. He wears European dress to its minutest details. Even then people like Patrick suspect his loyalty and call him a Wog and Savage calls him Sammy. Savage gives a very crude example to describe India and Indians. He believes, as a true Eurocentric that everything in India is wrong. He says that the Indian robin carries his red breast on his bottom (299). For Savage the houses of Bhowani are
jumbled and these squat on the rise of land with a sheet of dust and a smell of coal surrounding them.

K. P. Roy is portrayed as the villain of the piece. He is blamed for act of sabotage, derailment, murder and arson. He is also blamed for Hindu–Muslim clashes. He is portrayed as Russian agent. Govindaswami says that Congress high command gives information to him regarding the movement of K. P. Roy.

Masters further shows that the Indian Railway employees cannot maintain their institute and its facilities. While the European and Anglo-Indian institutes have clubs with dancing floors. Masters has resorted to the similar stereotype portrayal of Indians in The Deceivers. One is further reminded of a screen play by Din (1999). In this screen play, a Pakistani, Mr. Khan, is presented as a bully and a cruel tyrant towards his racially mixed family. Pakistani traditions and culture is also made fun of. However, his English wife Ella is portrayed as an accomplished and culturally superior woman, who is invariably cool and can handle any situation.

VI. Portrayal of Mimicry among Indians and Anglo-Indians

(Victoria, Taylor):

The Anglo-Indians are racially half-Indians, and are the classic example of the mimicry and hybridity. They man the Delhi-Decan Railway. The Anglo-Indians mimic the British to the extent of considering themselves as British or at least Domiciled Europeans. Their parlours are decorated in imitation of the British, with second hand British furniture. They speak English, though mostly with an accent. The walls of their drawing rooms flaunt pictures of King Emperor and Queen Empress. Only those paintings are selected which depict the scenes from the "Home", like a deer in fog or dogs with salmons in their mouths.

Patrick Taylor likes to wear St. Thomas's tie, an exclusive school for the Anglo-Indians, to maintain his hybrid status of an almost white man. Like any other mimic people, they are extremely touchy about their slippery identity. They can't afford to get the sun tan; therefore wearing hats is a must. He wears his topi the whole day to show that he is not an Indian. Women wear their topis even at home, so that they are not mistaken for the Indians. In spite of their knife and fork, they are not accepted as equal. Patrick is desperate to be acknowledged as a white man. Like a mimic man he believes that his interaction with Savage through Victoria will enhance his prestige and will compliment his personality. Because of his slippery status as a mimic man he is never sure of himself and commits blunders nonstop. He is repudiated by the white man and white culture, which has brought him into this shape and which he has adopted in toto (Fanon, 2008).
Mr. Jones, the father of Victoria, is an engine driver by profession. Mr. Jones and his whole family is flattered and pleased that a white Colonel is interested in Victoria.

Miss Victoria Jones is portrayed as better than other Anglo-Indians, because she is almost English. Her accent, her manners, her dress and bearing allows her to pass for an English lady. She confesses that she has always admired the English and she is more English than the English. She is thoroughly impressed by Savage for his super human qualities. She feels good for having closeness with Savage. For her, Bhowani is a ramshackle old city with narrow and crowded streets. The Indians are noisy and are squatting idly and shouting to one another. The place is full of flies. E. M. Forester (1981) has also described India and Indians in the same way. He has portrayed Fielding, Mrs. Moor and Adela Quested as superior human beings, because of their race and culture. Indian Aziz is portrayed as a mimic man. He is ashamed of himself, of his culture and living. Indian landscape, Indian sun and rivers are nothing when compared to England. He is never sure of himself and behaves like an immature and childish person. Her status and circumstances are not different from what is presented and discussed by Frantz (2008) of a woman of colour and white man. She is practically white, but she is forced to decline the marriage offer of Savage because she knows she cannot have respect and place even after marriage.

In her search for self-discovery and identity, she comes closer to Kasel. She realizes very soon that nothing is common between the two of them and she knows nothing about India or Indians. Their dancing, music, food, clothes, drinks and houses are different. Their life style is different. Like Changez, in The Reluctant Fundamentalist (Hamid, 2007), her four year stay in Delhi, in the company of the British officers, has put her on the path for a quest for her identity. She has realized that in spite of her half blood, her perfect English, she is not treated as English. English officers consider her only as a sex object. One British officer, Captain Macaulay, even tries to rape her. She kills him. She is always treated as lesser and inferior. Another British officer, Captain Tallent, also exploited her position as a chee chee girl. He pretends to love her but tells his friends that she is free for the taking. England is not her home. After she has murdered Macaulay, she tries to become an Indian. Starts wearing saris moves around with Kasel, even tries to become a Sikh. But there is a permanent gauze screen between the two of them. Masters highlights gap between cultures of different communities inhabiting India. Victoria wants Kasel to kiss her but; he being slave to his culture cannot kiss his beloved before marriage. Even the mother of Kasel, Sirdarni Amrita Kasel reminds her that in spite of her mimicry, the English invariably insult them. Her own Anglo-Indian community finds this scandalous and disowns her. Her situation is not different from Anna Karenina, after she leaves her legitimate husband and escapes with Vronsky (Tolstoy, 1999). At this stage, she is desperate for the support of Savage. She knows that his proximity can save her. Her condition is very similar to a typical mulatto woman who wishes to become one with a white man as discussed by Frantz (2008).
After flirting with the idea of becoming an Indian, and ending up in marriage with Kasel, Victoria turn towards Savage with a vengeance. In this she is different from Changez. She realizes that there is no gauze screen between Savage and herself. They understand each other completely. She wishes to kiss the feet of Savage (282). This is the portrayal of the mimicry and quite in line with the ideas of Fanon, regarding the interaction between a woman of colour and a white man (2008). Victoria shortly realizes that the hybridity of race and mimicry of culture are useless. The British are never to accept her as an equal. Mrs. Lanson makes it plain to Victoria that she does not belong to England, in spite of Victoria's intimacy with Savage. At a social get together, makes Victoria to look like the mistress or a tart of Savage and nothing more. Similar possible future experiences and considerations on the part of Victoria make her refuse the marriage of Savage.

VII. Masters' Silence on the Portrayal of Indian Freedom Movement:

Masters is totally silent on the Indian struggle for freedom. There is no reference to the brave struggle put up by the Indians for independence or by the Muslims under Jinnah for Pakistan. He is silent on the British atrocities against the Indians. Said (1994) maintains that the colonialist discourses obscure the native political reality, with the objective to strengthen the colonialist idea of history. It is typical of the British novelists writing about India. E. M. Forester (1981) is also silent on this. Instead Masters focuses upon and highlights the terrorist activities of one K. P. Roy. Roy is blamed for everything that goes wrong in India. Murder, arson, train derailments, Hindu- Muslim clashes. Almost every Congress activist is portrayed as in touch with Roy. The objective is to malign the freedom movement and to discredit its leadership. Masters hardly says anything about the possibility that Roy might be the invention of the imperial mind or machinery to shift the blame. He refers to the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in a very casual way through Govindaswami, the Indian Collector. The Collector suggests that Indians might force the government to repeat that incident. He even blames the Sardarni for the 1919 massacre. Sardarni is shown as very critical of the top leadership of Congress. Masters refers to the Indian War of Independence, 1857 as Black Year. He mentions the English sacrifices (370), but never talks about atrocities committed by the British against the Indians. He also glorifies the valour and the bravery of the British. On the other hand, Ahmed Ali (2000) a Pakistani writer has portrayed the 1857 War of Independence from the Indian and Muslim perspective. Ali blames the British for the massacre of the Indians and holds them responsible for the destruction of the great culture and civilization of India. Ali rejects the claim of the British of doing anything good for India or Indians.

VIII. Conclusion:

The study, through an exhaustive analysis of the novel and ample cross references has shown that John Masters has portrayed and presented the British characters,
especially the protagonist of the novel, Colonel Savage, as super humans. Masters has tried to show that Savage is superior to the Indians and Anglo-Indians because he belongs to a superior race and is brought up in a superior culture. The Indians are presented as inferior stereotypes because they belong to a lesser race and are the product of a lesser culture and civilization. They occupy the marginal space in the narrative. It is Colonel Savage who dominates the narrative as the central and most important character. This is to establish the Western culture as superior and universal. This is the manifestation of the Eurocentric thought of Masters. This confirms the main postulate of the study that colonialist discourses reinforce the colonialist ideology of superiority. The major focus of the narrative of Masters is to highlight the positive attributes of the British and their culture through the person and personality of Savage. The objective is to show that the British were here for the service of India and Indians. The Indians characters exist on the margins and are presented as inferior stereotypes. None is portrayed as a competent, capable and likeable person. They are presented as idiots, fools and ridiculous people. The congress leadership of Bhowani is shown to be in touch with the Raj machinery. Some of them are planted by the British. The whole novel is silent on the Indian freedom movement. The study has shown that in the colonialist narratives the native characters occupy marginal and lesser space. The natives are never shown as worthy human beings, in spite of their adoption of the culture of the colonialists. In these narratives, the natives never discover their own identity, and remain like headless chicken. However, in postcolonial narratives, the natives ultimately discover their own identity, they give up mimicry and return to their culture and traditions, like Changez (Hamid, 2008) Sriram and Bharat (Narayan, 2000).

References:


