

Subjugation and Antagonism in the Colonised Societies in the Selected Short Stories of D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the contribution of D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham to the English society by their literary endeavours through selected short stories. The Victorian period was a transitional period and witnessed significant growth in the literary pursuits of English literature. It dealt with the contemporary issues and problems of the day, including social, economic, religious and intellectual subjects, troubles in relation to the industrial revolution. The British colonisation has caused various physical and traumatic afflictions on them for centuries. The emergence of postcolonial literature considered the subjugated souls of the indigenous nations that were under the colonial rule. The postcolonial study gathers the historical and literary legacies of the nations that were afflicted under this regime. The repercussions of the colonial ruthlessness have had an effect of turmoil on the various established institutions of the cluttered societies of the indigenous. The colonised groups were forced to relinquish their authority over their social and cultural practices. The colonial literature neglected the social and cultural conventions of the indigenous peoples considering them inferior to the colonial culture. The Western supremacy regarded the Orient as inferior to their status. The peoples were associated with the subhuman qualities. Critics of the thirties believed that a writer must use grandiloquent words, mystifying ideas and a complicated style, to be considered as a serious writer. Whereas D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham were the simple story tellers, their style was vivid and direct. Both had an intuitive feeling and knowledge of the drifts and fashions in the contemporary literary society, they well fathom the emotional needs of their readers. The authors explore human nature through frank discussions of sex, psychology, and religion and combines accurate social setting with penetrating psychological analysis and eagerness to explore areas beneath the surface of human behavior.

Introduction

The British entered the portals of India and other countries with the motive of getting supremacy or economic hegemony over a land of rich heritage and culture. One of the main reasons for the Europeans to sail the oceans was to find new trade routes to Asia, especially, to India. Loomba expresses the real essence of Colonialism as

“the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods” (2).

Britishers took over many countries including India with authoritative commands and devised a mechanism to channelize the flourishing economy of the targeted land in order to augment the economic status of England. Hence, a study of this relationship between the colonizers and its colony is important to understand in this paper the present developments and future prospects of colonized nations. They not only succeeded in controlling most of the colonised territory, but also successfully colonized various aspects of the imperialised lands like culture, politics, economy and education. Britishers also became an inseparable part of targeted lands. Hence, in their conquest of India, Burma and Malaysia two important objectives of the British emerge: Profit and spreading civilization among the countries. This paper briefly examines how the hostile and atrocious policies of the British, intended to achieve the above mentioned objectives, systematically impoverished the people, both physically and mentally.

The British colonisation has caused various physical and traumatic afflictions on them for centuries. The emergence of postcolonial literature considered the subjugated souls of the indigenous nations that were under the colonial rule. The postcolonial study gathers the historical and literary legacies of the nations that were afflicted under British regime. The repercussions of the colonial ruthlessness have had an effect of turmoil on the various established institutions of the cluttered societies of the indigenous. The colonised groups were forced to relinquish their authority over their social and cultural practices.

Britishers implemented their ideologies by establishing power centers with the help of English people and such persons’ mindset and implications are beautifully captured in the short stories of D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham. The short story is not shortened form of a novel. It consists of all the components of fiction that is plot, character, and setting but these tools are treated within a certain limit. All the elements need to be given an equal importance to curvy the intended idea of the author. Sometimes one may dominate the other two. Edward Albert defines short story in History of English Literature as

A short story is, or should be, a simple thing; it aims at producing the single vivid effect; it has to seize the attentions at the outset and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of human capacity to attend closely therefore set limit to it. It must explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue sets in (203).

The language of a short story is simple and easy to understand. The popularity of the short story has grown and spread from England, France, Russia and America. Kipling, Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekov, D H Lawrence and Somerset Maugham are the masters of this

particular genre, who created a great impact on other writers of this form, till today it is reflected in their short stories.

The Trauma of Dislocation in D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham Short Stories

English had ruled more than fifty percent of the World; the colonial aggression was exercised in the literary pursuits also. In colonial literature, there was no reference to the regional and national socio-cultural patterns of the indigenous nations. The colonial literature neglected the social and cultural conventions of the indigenous peoples considering them inferior to the colonial culture. The Western supremacy regarded the Orient as inferior to their status. The peoples were associated with the subhuman qualities says Edward Said in his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*.

“[...] the Orient is represented in terms of the qualities that the Westerners do not wish to attribute themselves, qualities like decadence, laziness, stupidity, sensuality, effeminacy, etc. The people in the East are seen as ‘masses and not as individuals’” (91).

Britishers views were considered to be true without proper validation. D H Lawrence travelled extensively, and, therefore, their stories are set in different parts of the world. While Lawrence wrote about people in European countries and Mexico, the themes around which his stories are woven includes ones such as the effect of War on the lives of people altering them permanently, the class and race distinctions in the society they lived in, and also their perception of people from different parts of the world.

Lawrence wanted to capture the social changes sweeping across the continent, making an impact on the complex lives of a variety of individuals, destroying the decaying old order, and rejuvenating whatever had the potential to grow. He wanted to lead his readers into awareness and make him acknowledge how the world was changing. David Herbert Lawrence's perception that the world he lived in was oppressive, and his writing clearly reflected the brutal restrictions imposed on individuals and their choices. There are several examples of members of the aristocratic society looking down upon people of common blood in Lawrence's stories. Hadrian, a young man in *You Touched Me*, talks of the presence of class distinctions in English society. Hadrian was telling about Canada. He was going back there when his leave was up.

'You wouldn't like to stop in England, then?' said Mr. Rockley. 'No, I wouldn't stop in England,' said Hadrian. 'How's that? There's plenty of electrician here,' said Mr. Rockley. 'Yes. But there's too much difference between the men and the employers over here--too much of that for me,' said Hadrian (379).

The daughters of his adopted father, however, look down upon him and criticize him for not knowing his place. Initially they do not want to acknowledge that their days at the helm of power are coming to an end. In this story, the orphan and a lady of means get married, and this symbolizes the leveling of differences. Lawrence describes members of the working class with a certain admiration of their qualities by saying that they were the rough, inarticulate, powerfully emotional men and women. (186). An educated person like the doctor actually felt energized by being in contact with such people in the short story *The Horse Dealer's Daughter*.

Lawrence's *The Princess* exhibits a similar disdain, schooled as the central character has been by her father that she was the last of the royal blood. The frustration of the common man is exposed when her guide rapes her repeatedly. Lawrence did not just stop with highlighting the difference between the two classes. He often made an effort to describe the emotional energy and intuitive intelligence of the labourer, and how it impressed the members of the upper class.

Lawrence. In *The Force of Circumstance*, Doris comes to learn from her husband that before his marriage, he had started to live with a fifteen year old native woman, who had borne three children. Guy had paid for her to live with him, but he had no qualms in asking her to leave, once he had decided to take an English wife. On her part Doris, who ultimately leaves him, does not do it because it was wrong on his part to leave a woman like that. She even says repeatedly that she is not angry with him and she understands why he had lived like that. This shows how none of the characters realize that they had a callous and racist view of Malays as inferior beings that did not deserve just treatment. Guy even says that he did not feel any love for his kids. In many of the stories white men look on natives as inferior, and even towards the end of the story, there is no acknowledgement of natives as anything but strange and immoral. The missionary in Fear says of the Chinese people that they were a lying people, untrustworthy, cruel, and dirty (486).

D. H. Lawrence describes the Mexican native's deep feeling of connection with the sun and the moon, in contrast to the rich white miner, who is excessive fond of money, which is why the main character in his story *The Woman who Rode Away* found the tribal life so meaningful that she was ready to be sacrificed by the natives to bring a better life for the forest dwellers, rather than live a dull but secure life with her husband and children. In *The Blind Man*, the soldier who had lost his sight is able to live a fulfilled life in his farm.

He milked the cows, carried in the pails, turned the separator, attended to the pigs and horses. Life was still very full and strangely serene... (133).

It is only in his later stories that Lawrence describes the dehumanizing effects of the world war which created havoc in every single home in Europe. At the very beginning of *The Lady Bird* the author talks about such a terrible loss in the life of Lady Beveridge.

... she herself might have died of sheer agony, in the years 1916 and 1917, when her boys were killed, and her brother, and death seemed to mow in wide swathes through her family (83).

Lady Beveridge is one of the characters who got over her loss with great determination.

Maugham being the contemporary of D.H. Lawrence wrote more than hundred short stories with varied themes and in different situations and places. Many of his stories were set in Malaysia or related to many parts of the world. His stories overflow with, simplicity of ordinary happenings and everyday occurrences. Commenting on the achievement of William Somerset Maugham as a short story writer, T.O. Beach Croft in *The Modest Art: A survey of the short story* in English says,

Perhaps the greatest of all literary influences on the short story in the years following the Second World War has been the tremendous prestige of Somerset Maugham both in his practice and his critical opinion (214).

Maugham created a niche for himself in writing the short stories especially depicting about the people who lead unhealthy life due to war and colonisation of the Britishers all over the world. When they are exposed to a new culture and tradition, the basic root is shaken in understanding the lifestyle of the people. They also take time to get accustomed with the natives.

Maugham has got gentle feelings towards the subjugated; he stoops down to their level and displays it in his short stories with apathetic tone. He puts himself in the place of the sufferers to understand their intricate feelings of them and registers in his short stories carefully without missing the spirit of it. This aspect of Maugham was flashed light on by Angus Wilson in Introduction W Somerset Maugham:

A Maugham Twelve... yet basically it is, I believe, with exiles that his place lay and about whom he wrote most feelingly (67).

Maugham was an agnostic. Quite early in life he concluded that there was no meaning in life except what one gives it oneself. He succeeded in giving a pattern to his life. But this did not satisfy him. Throughout his life he was engaged in an insatiable quest for the meaning of life. He travelled far and wide in this pursuit. The presence of this quest and a few instances of the human condition in this direction, what men and women have made of their lives, are etched in his short stories and he seldom allowed the inquirer in him to dominate the entertainment.

The Trembling of a Leaf presents the aftermath of war and colonial antagonism. Due to the war and colonization, many people from England moved to various parts of the world for different purposes and this isolation had developed an exquisite sensitiveness to their predicament. As Klaus W. Jonas says of their reincarnation as fictional characters in Maugham and the East: The Human Condition: Freedom in The World of Somerset Maugham:

An Anthology, the heroes of these short stories are those weak and unsettled natures who are equally subject to undivided joy and to boundless, extreme despair (102).

It was true that the Europeans were the rulers who were powerful and strong. Because of the establishment of the Britishers all over the world, many English people were sent to all parts of the world to rule and monitor the colonial countries. They found it hard to mingle with the natives and they also had a divide because of their domination over the natives of the country in which they lived. They were away from home on an alien soil forming a minority in the midst of the natives. The major minority of them came to these remote places because of economic reasons. A few like Lawson in The Pool for health reasons and a few others like Ginger Ted in The Vessel of Wrath came out of their homeland because they were unwanted at home. Very few are happy in these unfamiliar surroundings. Like Walker in Mackintosh, Warburton in The Outstation, and Arnold Jackson and Edward Barnard in The Fall of Edward, many came to their hometown because of their bad contact with the natives of the colonial countries Anthony Curtis in *The Pattern of Maugham*:

A Critical Portrait considers that Maugham's short story turn on the passions of a white man for a coloured woman and in none is the outcome of a happy one (158).

Most of them pay dearly for their passion. They developed fascination towards the native young girls. They took advantage of them and tried to persuade them for physical relationship and a few British occupants crossed the border limitations by getting married to them. Later they suffered alienation among their clan of people. In all these relationships the initial happiness and enthusiasm faded when the British occupants faced humiliation among their group. They were secluded from the mainstream of their country when they moved back to their native place and many a time, they felt embarrassed due to their wedding with the native girl. Hence L Brander remarks that in Somerset Maugham: *A Guide* in The South Sea short story all had a savage realism and ugly violence in which the characters usually achieved their own degradation (107).

Ted Morgan observes that in Somerset Maugham:

A Guide, Maugham filed the patent on a certain kind of story, set in the tropics and usually describing the undoing of the characters because they have failed to understand their surroundings (256).

Mackintosh and Lawson are rendered a sort of void because of their surroundings and find escape in suicide. Artists are essentially aloof people and are apt to seek solitude.

In comparison, Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham are uniformly serious and never frivolous on any topic. A remarkable contrast in the approach of the writers to their short stories had become an apparent when we examine how they wrote the ending. The episodes in Lawrence's stories are just that. They are an interesting account of a short period in the lives of the characters, and although their lives have been altered through these episodes, it rarely comes to an end. Lawrence's endings permit us to feel the unpredictability of life, as we are not sure what is going to happen next in the lives of these characters. Maugham's stories, however, often end with a comical twist in the fortunes of the characters, in suicides and tragic deaths, as the writer wraps up the lives of the characters which have been altered irreversibly. Life in Lawrence's stories is in a flux, and we feel life continuing in myriad pathways even after the story ends. David Herbert Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham perception that the world they lived in was oppressive, they were similar, and their writings clearly reflected the brutal restrictions imposed on individuals and their choices. This should be considered the mark of an unhealthy society. The difference lies in their portrayal of this oppressive state of affairs. Lawrence focuses on how the oppressed fought their way out of their predicament, while Maugham captures the exclusivity and sophistication of the oppressors and the coarseness and vulgarity of the oppressed in greater detail. He dwells more on the comic peculiarities of the situation than on any visible growth or change that overcomes the oppression.

Conclusion

D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham express the intricate emotions of England through various short stories in order to protect and guide the society in the right path. No matter the struggles they may undergo. They instructed and inculcated the positive attitude in their countrymen through their short stories to settle the traumatic postwar effects of England. They took up the powerful weapon of Literature to moralise the society.

D H Lawrence and W Somerset Maugham succeeded in achieving the highest aim of art that is to stimulate the social reformers who used literature as propagandist's platform to moralise the English society. The debased world, which debilitates vitality so disastrously, takes many forms in their stories. They show their deep concern for the struggles and fortunes of men and women who have to bear the brunt of the prevailing social order and the new values created by a new civilization, which strikes the very roots of spirituality. Their purpose of writing these literary

pieces of art are to explicitly express their view on the changing attitude of the people of England according to their day today lifestyle. To sum up, the writers were eminently successful in recreating episodes of life through their short stories. They took up many themes that were relevant to the readers of their day and handled with skill and imagination.

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