

The Idea of the Oriental and the Occidental in *Kim, A Passage to India* and *East, West*

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Abstract— Once upon a time the East was called as the exotic Orient and the West, as capitalist Occident. Novels by Kipling and Forster highlighted this dichotomy through their stories. This article aims to show that East and West are not mere isolated constructs; later novels are examples of this fact. East and West have common points of referents and can coalesce to form a ‘contact zone’. This article through illustrations from different novels belonging to different time frames, aims to show this point of “in-between-ness”.

Index Terms— Occident; Orient; Rudyard Kipling; E.M. Forster; Salman Rushdie; East; West; Hybridity; Ambivalence

I. INTRODUCTION: ORIENT IN THE EYES OF THE OCCIDENT

THE eccentricities of the East have always had an unsettling influence on the West. Tagged as ‘Primitive’ and preconceived as ‘Animistic’ in its makeup, the West made certain fundamentally fallacious assumptions regarding the East. The reasons may be political, social or economic but the *orientalising* of the orient was a conscious exercise by the West that led to the postponing or deferring of the idea of the East. Initially the Orientalist’s interest rested in carrying out a pedagogical investigation regarding the East in order to understand its socio-economic and politico-religious structure. Its relationship with the Orient was essentially textual. Armed with these bookish notions he travelled the length and breadth of the Orient “proving the validity of these musty truths”¹ and thereby getting inadvertently trapped in these myths regarding the East. Thus the Orientalist’s observances of the geography and the people around became rigid and pedantic and he

uncomprehendingly labelled the natives as ‘degenerate’ and the locale, ‘exotic’. These studies produced two very different images of the East. One was positive and authentic, one that considered the East as a treasure trove of knowledge and the second being a romantic and mysterious East- one that was inscrutable and sphinx-like, an antique land with an antiquated way of life. Orientalists defined the East in timeless and essentialist terms as a “closed system in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter” (70)². What started as a geopolitical inquiry into the “aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological” (Said, 12) structures turned into, in V.G. Kiernan’s words, “Europe’s collective day-dream of the Orient” (Said, 52),

“Two hundred years ago India was the land of the fabulous and fantastic, the ‘Exotic East’. Travellers returned with tales of marble palaces, gilded domes, of kings who weighed themselves in gold, and of dusky maidens dripping with pearls and rubies. Before this sumptuous backdrop passed elephants, tigers and unicorns, snake charmers and sword swallows, pedlars of reincarnation and magic, long-haired ascetics on beds of nails, widows leaping into the pyre. It was like some glorious and glittering circus- spectacular, exciting, but a little unreal”³.

That the East/India could be an enriching cultural experience was overlooked by the “erudite” white-travellers. Thus this idea of the East as “the alien, the exotic, the distant”⁴ essentially stemmed out of the West’s need to legitimize itself as a superior culture. Thus the oriental East was a construct of

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¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978, p.52

² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978, p.70

³ John Keay, *India Discovered*, 2001, p.13

⁴ James.G. Carrier, *Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside Down*, American Ethnologist, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 195-212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645033>.

the European highbrows of the 19th century West. Inflexible by temperament, they were conditioned by an ancestry of prejudice toward the East that dated from the days of Herodotus and Aeschylus. According to such supposedly biased and unsophisticated views, the Asians (and the Arabs) were considered tribal, emotional, and uncouth. Victor Davis Hanson in his article *Occidentalism: the False West* makes an interesting observation that, in the view of Edward Said and other postcolonial critics, this diffused outlook towards the Asians, Arabs and such other unfamiliar communities is a product of an "Orientalism"⁵. People of the "alien" races were supposedly prone to violence, fundamentalism, and irrational thinking- a disreputable society of "idolators who worshipped cows and monkeys..." (Keay, 27). The East became a composite image of a series of complex constructions and representations-- an inauthentic picture that is authenticated because it is a white man's 'rational' perception of an ethnic race. So what really distances the East from the West or deforms the perception of the 'other' and renders it fantastical is ethnocentrism⁶. Ethnocentrism infuses a sense of remoteness that is not only physical and geographical but also psychological and cultural. The West thought about the East ethnocentrically and thus failed to comprehend its autochthonous way of life assuming that the European institutions like capitalism, nationalism, rationalism, and Christianity were beyond its ken. And it was not possible for those unsophisticated races of the East to emulate the rational and civilized ways of the West-

"Little was understood of their customs, whether Muslim or Hindu, and few thought much of their character. 'As degenerate, crafty, wicked and superstitious a people as any race in the known world', thought a contemporary, adding 'if not more so'". (Keay, 23)

The West constructed extremely resistive and monolithic edifices of the East, describing and defining each other in the idiom of *différance* as- 'us' and 'them', 'occident' and 'orient', 'East' and 'West', 'masculine' and 'feminine', 'rational' and 'sensual'. The orient was antiquated, and the occident was modern; the East was stereotypical, and the West was dynamic. Just because the East wasn't ideologically and ethnologically coterminous with the empirical West, the latter envisaged the age old traditions and rites and rituals of the

East as barbaric, exotic and alien because it failed to understand the East's organismic view of society. Thus a strange and fantastical East came into existence that was bizarre, out of the way, weird and wonderful at the same time. All these images were circulated to legitimize Western supremacy over the Eastern races. Thus the Eastern world graduated from the effeminate to the feminine. With the advent of colonialism, a convoluted and coloured idea of the effeminate East came into existence. So much so that both colonized women and men became subject to the colonial inconsistencies of Western men. Colonized women were identified in terms such as "alluring", "inviting", "sensuous", and "tantalizing" and colonized men were regarded as "debased", "virile", "effete", and "aggressive". Most writers from the West were pre-occupied with a "feminized" and morally decadent idea of the East and due to its subjugated and dominated position in the power structure its civilization and civilians were dubbed as 'stupid' or 'sensually' disposed. Western-Oriental scholars of the West also occupied themselves with a project of self-definition. They achieved it by constructing images and stories about 'the West' through its characterizations of 'the East'. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit observe, "...the view of the West in Occidentalism is like the worst aspects of its counterpart, Orientalism, which strips human targets of their humanity" (10). The very genesis of 'Occidentalism'⁷ can be traced to 'Orientalism' and constructing an idea of 'the West' echoes the central concern of Orientalism,

Seeing Orientalism as a dialectical process helps us recognize that it is not merely a Western imposition of a reified identity on some alien set of people. It is also the imposition of an identity created in dialectical opposition to another identity, one likely to be equally reified that of the West. Westerners, then, define the Other in terms of the West, but so Others define themselves in terms of the West, just as each defines the West in terms of the Other. (197)⁸

II. PROBLEM OF TERMINOLOGY

It would be interesting to note at this juncture that both terms Occidentalism and Orientalism are quite reductive in nature. Both distort the way in which they present each other by producing extremely essentialist notions of each other. If Orientalism saw the East as a "curio" to be dissected and

⁵ According to Edward Said, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'". (2) They bring out their essence by acting as binary opposites. Basically, this dwells on the dissimilarities and differences between the East and the West.

⁶ Ethnocentrism is defined as "the habit of seeing things only from the point of view of one's own group. To judge one culture by the standards of another is ethnocentric" taken from Howard F. Taylor, Margaret L. Anderson. *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society*, Wadsworth Publishing Co. Inc, 2005 .p.67

⁷ Occidentalism pertains to a). a stereotyped and dehumanized view of the western/European and English speaking world and b). ideologies and visions developed about the west by the non-West. The term is an inversion of 'Orientalism', Edward Said's term for defining the east by the west.

⁸ James.G. Carrier, *Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside Down*, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 195-212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645033>

studied as a rare anthropological phenomenon, then the Occidentalists' view of the West was also one of "curiosity"-the West as a bizarre mechanical manifestation of capitalism. Mohamed Hamoud Kassim Al-Mahfedi and Venkatesh P's statement corroborates this process, "The East-West or Occident-Orient demarcation was engulfed by the Orientalist/colonialist ramifications such as colonial and imperial projects, superior/inferior classification, racism and dispossession, displacement and alienation, global dualities and all other colonial traumas and legacies."⁹ It is out of this dichotomy that the terms emerged. Both Occidentalism and Orientalism are offshoots of the Us/Them divide. It is the 'difference' between the two entities that has resulted in undesirable consequences. It has "lead to an exaggerated and even false sense of difference"¹⁰ – a difference that has sketched embarrassing and undemocratic accounts of the societies of the East and the West. The recurrence of 'other' motifs like masculine/feminine, civilized/uncivilized, east/west in western writings resulted in a biased outlook towards cultures and ethnic social structures of the East and the Middle East. Besides, both the terms East and West are unstable, agonized and ever-changing, thus resisting the growth of each other. Therein lies the problem of the two.

Symptomatically the otherness of Orientalism is Occidentalism and thus the 'other' is all the things that the West does not connote. Thus European assumptions and expectations have often resulted in tinted accounts of Eastern places visited by them. Foreign travel narratives have never been a true window to the East. The 'other', in this instance, signifies a people without history and without an evolving identity. In British fiction one often comes across blatant comparisons with non-English races in order to define the essence of the English character displaying "the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth century European colonialism" (Said, 2). But the opposite, i.e. looking at the so-called superior race from the point of view of the oriental is indeed a rarity. The native-foreigner relationship is a dense and multilayered one. The white-skinned men, for their part, have often looked upon the orientals as exotic, absurd, barbaric- an effeminate race that all too easily succumbs to sentiments and superstitions. This mind-set has shaped Western writings on India to a large extent. In these, the West is presented as masculine and rational and the East as feminine and irrational. Postcolonial critics are often of the view that when it comes to representations, Western novelists have used India as a tool of dislocation of an individual and its subsequent reaffirmation as a civilized urbanite. Apt examples

will be Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*.

III. KIPLING'S ORIENTAL VIEW

Rudyard Kipling, popularly known as the bard of imperialism and chauvinism, in his novel *Kim* sympathetically and willingly explores the Indian landscape and culture. It is a sophisticated and original attempt to break through the boundaries of Anglo-Indian literature. The novel is a thrilling mix of admiration for imperialism and for Indian mysticism. It also leaves subconscious messages layered with the Social Darwinism of the day - a strict hierarchy and the idea of dominion over others. *Kim* is a quintessentially imperialist novel. Everything in the book- ranging from its characters to its setting and the ideology behind the story oozes an imperialistic flavor. The sahibs are full of wisdom and they "...never grow old. They dance and they play like children when they are grandfathers" (187) all because the Sahibs are "a strong-backed breed" (187). Kim's frequent reiteration about being a Sahib, "...I will be a Sahib" (117) or "...I am still a Sahib" (164), which he keeps reminding the lama and the people around him, is almost synonymous with Kipling's fixation with the Orient. But Kipling does make some stark comments voicing some of the most progressive ideas of his age; "The white man is very wise in some matters and very foolish in others" or when Kim posits his view about the hills- "Air and water are good, and the people are devout enough, but the food is very bad", Kim growled; 'and we walk as though we were mad- or English...' (199) or when Kim reminds the Lama that he is "neither black nor white". Baboo Hurree Chunder's confession that he is only a Babu showing off his English to Kim because "All we Babus talk English to show off" (157) shows him as a representative of the abstract Other, whose entire psyche is subconsciously linked to an English speaking universe. One cannot turn a blind eye to the Orientalist idea of the exotic East- "It was a great feast" (Kim rubbed his stomach). 'I saw Rajahs, and elephants with gold and silver trappings; and they lit all the fireworks at once...' (111). Kipling's *Kim* is an orientalist's paean on imperialism. But on the other hand it also reflects the author's love for India and brings to light the worst of the West. In a way Kipling sympathises with the East in his characteristic patronizing attitude when he makes a distinction between a European like Creighton, a Babu like Hurree Chunder and a native like Kim- "It is all new, and they cannot talk Hindi. They are only uncurried donkeys" (76). Somehow Kim and Babu Hurree Chunder are unable to absorb the two disparate schisms of East and West within their personalities. Colonel Creighton is the bridge between the East and the West and thus a solution to the endless rift between the two polarities. Kim's world view is Kipling's. As Salman Rushdie points out

⁹ Mohamed Hamoud Kassim Al-Mahfedi and Venkatesh P, 'Darwinist premise in the Orientalist construction of the "Other"', JPCS Vol 3, No 1, 2012, p 2.

¹⁰ James.G. Carrier, 'Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside-Down' American Ethnologist, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 203

“The influence of India on Kipling- on his picture of the world as well as his language- resulted in what has always struck me as a personality in conflict with itself, part bazaar-boy, part sahib”¹¹

IV. FORSTER’S EAST

E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* reflects the author’s interpretation of the relationship between India and the colonizing British; between the unfathomable East and the practical West. It also examines the quest for and failure of human understanding among various ethnic and social groups in India under the British rule-

“‘I have had twenty five years experience of this country’ - he paused, and ‘twenty five years’ seemed to fill the waiting room with their staleness and ungenerosity— ‘and during those twenty five years, I have never known anything but disaster result when English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially’” (145-146).

It not only demonstrates an essential lack of communication between the two cultures but also highlights simultaneously the dichotomy that defines East and West. The mind of the Oriental and the Occidental are dissected through Aziz’s introspection bringing to light the fact the Manichean dualism between the East and the West.

“Suspicion in the Oriental is a sort of malignant tumor, a mental malady, that makes him self-conscious and unfriendly suddenly; he trusts and mistrusts at the same time in a way the Westerner cannot comprehend. It is his demon, as the Westerner’s is hypocrisy” (248)

One reason for writing this novel can also be Forster’s undoubted attraction for the ‘Orient’. One can note the number of times the words ‘Orient’ and ‘Oriental’ are repeated throughout the novel. Forster like most novelists of his time is obsessed with the idea of the Orient and his ‘orientalizing’ of India made Western logic and capability very apparent and vindicates the West’s domination over the East. *A Passage to India* is Forster’s treatise on Orientalism in the sense that the novel “... promises to describe the other but, in fact, delivers only more stories about the self”¹². Fielding is the typical Orientalist, for whom India needs to be “understood” because it is a ‘muddle’. And Aziz is the Oriental, the one rooted to his religion, his society and his tradition and who feels stifled by

the presence of the English and “...caught in their meshes” (11). At one point Dr. Aziz explains that Mrs. Moore was in fact an English woman with an Oriental heart.

In *A Passage to India* one comes across a character called McBryde who makes use of a ‘scientific’ approach to prove the ethnic and national superiority of the British to the Indians. The West sees the East through Adela’s uncomprehending eyes. She becomes the representative of the West in a sense that she fails to understand or comprehend the deeper patterns and significance of life. Adela’s quest for the real India highlights how the Western mind sees the Orient- as profane and highly ambiguous,

“...they would see the Lesleys and the Callenders and the Turtons and the Burtons, and invite them and be invited by them, while the true India slid by unnoticed. Colour would remain- the pageant of birds in the early morning, brown bodies, white turbans, idols whose flesh was scarlet or blue- and movement would remain as long as there were crowds in the bazaar and bathers in the tanks. Perched up on the dog cart she would see them. But the force that lies behind cover and movement would escape her even more effectually than it did now. She would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit...” (38)

So also, the riot scene which recalls the Indian Mutiny is dubbed as the real India- “They were the toiling ryot, whom some call the real India”. Aziz, Miss Quested and Fielding, in spite of retaining their national characteristics, go their separate ways. In other words, the imperial powers justify their occupation and seek to dominate and subdue the colonized peoples. This ideology of the sahibs is mirrored in the personality of the collector Ronny Heaslop in *A Passage to India*, who in the words of Mr. Turton is, ‘...a sahib; he’s the type we want; he’s one of us’ (19). He becomes as it were the spokesperson of the white rulers: “India likes gods. And Englishmen like posing as gods” (41). But Forster affords no compromise or resolution. Just like ‘social-otherness’ or ‘political-otherness’, the Orient becomes a symbol of ‘sexual-otherness’. This is poignantly exemplified in the use of the menacingly beautiful Marabar Caves. The Marabar Caves defy all logic; they are misunderstood or rather confound the English and the Indians. The caves symbolize ‘otherness’ or all that is alien in nature. The audiences here are Europeans- white and racially superior. In the second case, travel writing may also contain the idea of England as envisioned by the Orient. In this case, the West assumes the status of the *other*-haloed, clinically perfect, stunning, orderly and rationally greater- in other words a world of fixities that steers clear of ambiguities. We get a picture of the ideal West when an Oriental writes a narrative born out of his bitter encounters

¹¹ ‘Kipling’ in *Imaginary Homelands* by Salman Rushdie, Granta Books, p. 74

¹² ‘Cargoism and Orientalism’ by Lamont Lindstrom, in *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, ed. James G. Carrier, Oxford University Press Inc, New York, 2003

with the West. “The mind of the West is weak, soft and sick like carbonated cola”, say Ian Buruma and Avishai Marglit. The statement holds true when one realizes that a single thematic thread runs through all Western travel writings from Marco Polo to French travelers to E.M. Forster- the picture of the East as fossilized, irrational, and obsessed with dead and decrepit customs. E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India*, gives an insight into the frenzied psyche of the East through mysterious echoes ‘Boum’ in the Marabar Caves. But if one analyzes the idea of the echo from close quarters it speaks of the feeble mind of the West that fantasizes the ‘Boum’ as a conundrum associated with Eastern culture. All rationality evaporates when Forster, the self-proclaimed spokesperson of the enlightened West, deciphers it as symbolic of something ‘alien’, the ‘otherness’ of India, i.e. complex, ungovernable, confusing and mysterious force. The ‘Boum’ is misinterpreted as it represents a concept that is “too foreign to us, by their way of living, by their culture” (Buruma, Marglit, 8)

V. THE IRRECONCILABLE OPPOSITES

John Keay the noted historian and author of *India Discovered: The Recovery of a Lost Civilization* believes that “India is not like the Middle East and its colonial exposure was of a different order. For every act of vandalism there were several of conservation, and for every paragraph of orientalist disparagement there was a page of wide-eyed wonder...On balance, though, I believe that to the scholars of the Raj, India’s heritage came to represent not some antithetical ‘other’ to be denigrated and marginalized but a spectacular survival with which they were anxious and proud to be associated, a jewel, indeed, in the crown” (6). *Kim* and *A Passage to India* as essentially imperialistic and oriental novels vindicate the above argument in all possible ways. Their portrayal of characters, their moral and physical topography, the diction and the very idea they espouse is extremely colonial in temperament and colour. India is seen and shaped through the colonizer’s gaze. These novels almost gratify the imperial mind and go a step ahead to support Orientalism. *Kim* and *A Passage to India* in more ways than one validate A.J.Arberry’s words, in *British Orientalist* (1943) says “Some day the whole story of British Indology will be told and that will assuredly make a glorious, fascinating and inspiring narrative”.¹³ Because these partisan opinions of the West consolidated the distorted perceptions of the East, the need to write back became an absolute necessity on the part of writers in response to an unequal cultural exchange. Although English language and literature have had a great impact on Indian English writings, one cannot deny the fact that these have been

moulded duly to suit the Indian taste. Though the writings are characterized by a sense of ambivalence and self-reflexivity; they also encompass within them an entire gamut of the Indian-Anglian ethos. The East certainly managed to speak in the language of the West and disproved Rudyard Kipling’s colonial myth “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet”¹⁴.

VI. A NEW WORLD ORDER

And they did meet in a fusion of sorts in Salman Rushdie’s *East, West*. That the East and the West are psycho-social constructs and have common points of referents that can overlap to form a state of in-between-ness that heralds the formation of a new social order is proved by the writer. Readers might have noticed that Western writings about the East have a strong Oriental flavor, but Eastern writings about the West hardly have an Occidental edge to them. Most Indian diapsora writers talk about a synthesis of the two- a balancing of the unequals because both terms can be disparaging at times, which results in the distortion of texts. Salman Rushdie’s *East, West* is good case of a cultural mélange. A collection of short stories, divided into three parts- East, West and East, West, the book is an intellectual balancing act between the two polarities of East and West deftly handled through Rushdie’s master penmanship. The title is deceptive, yet creative. Superficially it may lure the lay reader into perceiving it as yet another of those books that deal with cultural discrepancies or talk about the proverbial East-West divide. But a closer look will dispel these doubts. The use of the comma between the East and the West is emblematic of the commingling of the two cultures and is suggestive of the fact that East and West are more than hyphenated entities. Each has the capacity to encompass the other within its socio-cultural framework. The comma brings to fore the point that East and West are not mere stereotypes but rather an amalgam of ethnicity; Rushdie through his stories is able to find an in-between-ness between the two and the comma in fact acts as a bridge between the two disparate worlds. This clearly evident in a remark made by Zulu, one of the characters in the story ‘Chekov and Zulu’ in the third section of the book, “The sun is shining. The colonial period is a closed book”. (157)

VII. RUSHDIE’S EAST AND WEST

Rushdie’s *East, West* flouts in every way J.S. Mill’s official stamp of occidental goodness and authority that, “The Hindus are ‘thesis’, the Muslims are ‘antithesis’, we the British are the

¹³ John Keay, *India Discovered: The Recovery of a Lost Civilization*, Harper Collins Publishers, 2001, p.13

¹⁴ Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West*, 1889

‘synthesis’.” Because for every Ms. Rehana in ‘Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies’ who doesn’t wish to undertake her “passage to England” and lead a life of uncertainty in a strange land, faraway with a fiancée she hardly has any idea of except his name and the place, there is a starry eyed Chekov in ‘Chekov and Zulu’ for whom London is a perpetual carousel of fun and all that jazz. London is a full panoply of sights-theatres, operas, ballets, restaurants, cricket at Lords pavilion, St. James’s Park, and “Decent tailors, a decent mixed grill when you want it, decent magazines to read!” (155) because the city has “remnants of greatness” (155) in a social context. But for Ms. Rehana London is as fictitious and unreal as her fiancée “Mustafa Dar of Bradford, London” (8). Rehana is not even interested to get the locations correct much to the old Muhammad Ali’s chagrin. She is not the wide eyed traveler who longs to visit the land of the white people and hardly pays any attention to Ali’s constant reiteration about the fact that “London is a town only, like Multan or Bahawalpur. England is a great nation full of the coldest fish in the world”. (8)

Rushdie’s second story in the first section ‘A Free Radio’ tells the story of a handsome fool who is hoodwinked into losing his virility for a free radio. The setting is the riotous 70s India, where reality and imagination clash on the mental plains of naïve Ramani, the good-looking rickshawalla. Ramani becomes a victim of the western and modern methods of sterilization and vasectomy- of birth control unwittingly but later, having grown up on doses of pop-culture, builds a career in films in Bombay, because he knows that he “will become a bigger film star than Shashi Kapoor or Amitabh Bachchan even” (30). Ramani’s persona is the perfect example of the co-existence of the principles of the East and the West in the sense that he is not entirely overpowered by the oriental idea of fate and destiny and sets about to adapt to his “condition” in a pragmatically western manner.

The third story, ‘The Prophet’s Hair’ is a multilayered one. It is an exposé on fundamentalism, a moral fable on the good vs. evil conflict with overtones of divine intervention that is so much a part of the Eastern psyche. The story does have an Arabian Nights feel to it, but it is muted by the protagonist’s fanatic preoccupation with a religious relic that he inadvertently finds. Rushdie has neatly woven the idea of oriental religious conviction with occidental covetousness in the character of Hashim, the moneylender who besides “living honourably in the world” (41) likes “to teach these people the value of money....and they will be cured of this fever of borrowing borrowing all the time...” (41). Hashim is also like the American millionaires, “who purchase stolen art masterpieces and hide them away” (42). So it is only fair that he should possess the Prophet Mohammad’s hair without giving a thought to the ramifications it entails. He is the

proverbial material man who is fond of acquiring trinkets of power for his own selfish ends. ‘The Prophet’s Hair’ is allegorical in its structure and the writer quietly informs the reader about the destructive power that blind faith and a traditional outlook gone astray can wreck havoc upon seemingly innocent people.

The ‘West’ section of the collection too has its share of Eastern eccentricities and Western modernity. ‘Yorick’ is a parody of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. It is a twisty and tragic tale of love and childhood travails. All is not well and perfect in the glittering halls of the castle in Denmark. The problems faced by Hamlet, who is an insecure, devilish and sadistic child, and the court jester Yorick, and the meaninglessness in their lives are reflected in a plot and diction that is absurd and surreal. Rushdie presents the seemingly illogicality and irrelevance of the West through this Shakespearean spoof.

The second story ‘At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers’ presents a capitalistic, glittering, false and acquisitive west through Dorothy’s (of Wizard of Oz) mythical red ruby slippers. The ruby slippers are supposed to be magic and thus the object of desire of everyone present in the Grand Saleroom. The slippers stand for a commodified West that has undergone “intellectual corruption”¹⁵. Rushdie shows a decadent and morally decrepit West that can “mortgage our homes, sell our children, to have whatever it is we crave” (102). The plethora of characters that one meets in the Grand Saleroom- ‘movie stars’, ‘memorabilia junkies’, ‘behaviorist philosophers’, ‘quantum scientists’, ‘political refugees’, ‘exiles’, ‘displaced persons’, ‘tramps’, ‘men and women of dubious characters’, are all a part of an Occidental culture which more than often “reflects the fears and prejudices of urban intellectuals, who feel displaced in a world of mass commerce”¹⁶. The reader has already been witness to a similar philosophy in the ‘East’ section- ‘The Prophet’s Hair’. If the religious memorabilia can evoke within Hashim a desire to acquire divinity, then the ruby slippers can also be a talisman to fulfill one’s unlimited dreams. If the Prophet’s hair symbolizes the oriental idea of mysticism, then the ruby slippers in ‘At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers’ are symptomatic of the occident’s fetish for material things. This story is Rushdie’s satiric take on post-modern consumerism. So it would not be entirely wrong to say that both East and West have their own points of weaknesses.

The last story in the ‘West’ section ‘Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain Consummate their Relationship’ weaves a tale of sadistic passion, ambition and imaginary consummation of an unrealistic relationship between

¹⁵ ‘The Mind of the West’ in *Occidentalism* by Ian Buruma and Avishai Marglit, Penguin, p.87

¹⁶ Ibid, ‘The Occidental City’, p.30

Columbus and Isabella. Critics opine that Rushdie reduces the idea of the exploration of new vistas and New World to a state banal sexual orgy that remains unaccomplished. On a symbolic level one may assume that Rushdie here condemns the West's unquenchable colonizing enterprise which it carried out in a grand manner, reducing countries and their indigenous cultures to a state of a terminal decay all in the name of 'civilization' and 'edification',

"Columbus sees none of it, neither the land's fertility nor the sudden barrenness of the vanquished castles looking down from their pinnacles. The ghosts of defeated civilizations flow unnoticed down the river whose names- Guadalthis and Guadalthat- retain an echo of the annihilated past" (115).

Thus a closer look will reveal that the story also speaks about historical displacements and the problems faced by immigrants, contradictorily in a Western context.

The last section 'East, West' is an interesting mix of East/West, Us/Them, Orient/Occident. The three stories are diasporic in temperament. Rushdie the master raconteur tenaciously holds on to his convictions and his art. That is what makes his narratives special, insightful and having a life of its own. The three stories, 'The Harmony of the Spheres', 'Chekov and Zulu' and 'The Courter' become autonomous works of imagination. They create a global culture, very distinct from the pompous occident or the slaved orient; its set rules being a holistic literary custom and cosmopolitan imagination. The first story in the section 'The Harmony of Spheres' is a cross-cultural tale- of a young Indian and his encounters with a schizophrenic Eliot who is obsessed with the occult; Rushdie spins a fantastic and macabre narrative consisting of delirious orgies, mystical mumbo-jumbo, Satan, paranoia, and the space between reality and imagination. Eliot wishes to make a "...bridge between here-and-there, between my two othernesses, my double unbelonging" (141). Through Eliot, Rushdie informs the reader about the existence of a "fusion of world-views..." (141). Eliot's is also the story of how the rational mind of the west can become fanatically inclined towards supernatural and the esoteric. He through his fixation with "pentangles, illuminati, Maharishi, Gandalf: necromancy...and a counter culture" (137) also reiterates that fact that Western civilization gave credence to these pagan rites and rituals once upon a time and that it was not just another of those oriental hocus-pocus.

The second 'Chekov and Zulu' puts forth Rushdie's idea of a hybrid culture. In Chekov and Zulu the two characters, one finds an ideal blend of western pop culture (the Star-Trek mania), love for the West and an Eastern consciousness. The two besides being caught by the "Spirit of the *Enterprise*..."

are friends since their Doon school days. It is Star-Trek that binds the two and hence it can be surmised that Western television and science fiction come to stand for a sense of rootlessness as well as hybridity. Rootlessness in the sense that the characters are trying to make themselves at home in a foreign land and in order to achieve this they take up the stance of global unity. They are both trying to negotiate with new identities- their Indianess with their "Chekov" and "Zulu" avatars fighting the imaginary Klingons by critiquing the Empire as "intrepid diplomats" (150) in England- "Their museums are full of our treasures, I meant. Their fortunes and cities, built on the loot they took. So on and so forth. One forgives, of course; that is our national treasure. One need not forget" (156). The constant references to Tolkien's Middle-Earth and the Klingons are reminders of the fact that "this isn't the England of fair play, tolerance, decency, equality- maybe that place never existed anyway, except in fairy-tales"¹⁷ Though both the friends find London a comfortable place to live in, they know that the city has lost its charm and magic.

The last story in the section 'The Courter' is like an autobiographical homage to Rushdie's childhood days and all those who were an intrinsic part of it- his siblings, his cousins, his parents, especially his nanny. But the story has different shades to it- growing-up pangs, the longing for home, and the idea of an ideal 'home' in the life of immigrants, an autumnal love affair, racial dissent and cross-cultural dilemma. 'Certainly-Mary' and the hall porter Mecir whom she calls 'courter' because of mispronunciation have a silent affair. The silent communication is metaphorical of a hyphenated existence. Certainly- Mary is an Indian from Bombay and Mecir the "courter" is East-European, both living in cosmopolitan and racially ridden London indulging in "their private language" (195). It is deficiency of the Imperial tongue-the English language that draws them together. Meanwhile the narrator's simple boyhood escapades in Waverly House, in school, in London and with his three sisters are a façade; these naïve exploits mask his grim struggle for independence and autonomy from a diasporic existence. His fights with his father and his wait for the British passport have resonances of an immigrant's fight for survival in an alien land. Magic shoes, in this case, British passport and independence cannot take one back home. When the narrator's mother and Certainly-Mary fall prey to mistaken identity and Mecir is attacked by two British youngsters, one realizes that racial tension leads to a sense of defeat within the characters. All of them struggle to get on with their lives; the nanny, homesick goes back to Bombay, where she is happy, Mecir disappears into oblivion and the narrator becomes a man dispossessed with "ropes around my neck...pulling me this

¹⁷ 'The New Empire Within Britain' in *Imaginary Homelands* by Salman Rushdie, Granta Books, p. 134

way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding *choose choose*" (211). The idea of home has undergone a metamorphosis "Home has become such a scattered, damaged various concept in our present travails. There is so much to yearn for. There are so few rainbows anymore" (At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers, 93).

Thus the imbalance of perceptions is corrected. Rushdie successfully transgresses all forms of obstacles, be it territorial, ethnicity, time or religious beliefs to embrace a new form of literary citizenship in *East, West*- in the words of Peter Barry- of 'Cultural Polyvalency'. The deliberate use of Western pop songs, allusions to comic strips, local expressions and Indiansed English- "bleddy", baap re baap", "Allah Tobah", "Aadaabarz", "Tea-shee", "ji", "sahib", "achcha", "samajh liya" within an English narrative and plot structure reaffirms this. Words like "scare-zade", "Minotaur", "Mixed-Up", "Dodo" signify a cultural synthesis of sorts. Thus *East, West* become the perfect answer to East/West dichotomy. The collection of stories forms a colourful cultural collage of race, nation, language and symbols in the vast arena of diaspora writing. They are a palimpsest- with locales, dialogues, personas, thoughts and ideals intersecting and intertwining.

VIII. AND THE TWAIN MEET

Rushdie's collection of stories makes an innovative and creative attempt at fusing the two disparate "Others". The stories are an indication of the fact that the position of the 'Other-ness' has become destabilized and defunct. East and West cannot exist in irreconcilable exclusivity. They are part and parcel of a broader ethnicity which makes allowance for a state of in-between-ness. They are holistic components and not negative counterparts of each other.

The process of negation of one by the other dates back as far as the Crusades- the clashes between Islam and Christendom. Eventually Orientalism turned into an imperial project of the colonizers, justifying the West's colonial ambitions. Both Orientalism and Occidentalism illustrate a diminutive and abridged idea of the East and the West. Orientalism was in fact the West's stereotyped view about the East that negated the very authenticity of a civilization and its uniqueness. Occidentalism was coined as an inversion to Said's Orientalism. Just as the West negated the East as a muddle and a land of mystics- much in the same way- the East also perceived the West as an 'Other'. It would not be wrong to say that the East harboured an equally exotic idea of the West. The East put forth the view that the West was frozen by philosophy and that it was unable to apprehend an organic and natural way of life. Thus according to Occidentals matter was God and materialism the religion of the West. And the West,

unable to comprehend the innateness of Eastern life, pushed it to the boundaries of civilization and labelled it derogatorily as effeminately exotic and uncouth- in other words, 'Oriental'. Terms like 'other', 'exotic', 'oriental', 'barbaric' are a part of the broader discourse of Eurocentrism¹⁸.

Thus we can see that that the East is not a 'lost' civilization and the West didn't 'discover' it. The illustrations make evident the fact that there is a possibility of a cross-cultural contact between the two. Both East and West are complimentary terms. Said's Orientalism as a discourse in western culture, "which has consistently worked to construct a singular 'Orient' as the antithesis of a supposedly more enlightened West" (Thompson, 135), is no longer valid. Rather it throws light on the inadequacy of the written constructs about the East. The battle between the two constructs- Occidentalism and Orientalism- is in fact a tussle between cultures and worldviews. The Occident's iconic rationalism obliterated the Orient's spirit into kind of obscurity. It is a Manichean struggle between rationalism and spiritualism, shaping a dualistic division between the East and the West. With the passage of time colonization gave way to a state of inbetween-ness- a hybridity or a cross-over of ideas that has been creatively explored by writers of the postcolonial era through fiction. Both the East and the West holds a certain *je ne sais quoi* that is not only charming, alluring and glamorous, but also scintillating and appealing. East and West can meet to form a state of ambivalence where stereotyped colonial or Orientalist identities alter into more stable and dynamic hybrid identities. However this ambivalence is not akin to the Manichean relationship that underlies the colonizer/colonized dichotomy; rather it is an ambivalence "...out of which emerges a rich and incisive reconstruction of post-colonial experience"¹⁹. The intersection is well defined in the words of Chinua Achebe, "We lived at the cross-roads of cultures..."²⁰

IX. CONCLUSION: A CASE OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

The idea of choosing texts of different fictional genre- *Kim*, *A Passage to India* and *East, West* stems out of this idea. Though *Kim* and *A Passage to India* are novels exploring the ethos of Imperial India, the solution to the colonial portrayal of a nation is evident in Rushdie's *East, West*- a collection of

¹⁸ Critics define Eurocentrism as 'the practice of viewing the world from a European perspective, with an implied belief, either consciously or subconsciously, in the preeminence of European (and, more generally, of Western) culture, concerns and values at the expense of non- Europeans' (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurocentrism>)

¹⁹ 'Replacing the Text' in *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, p. 90.

²⁰ 'Replacing the Text' in *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, p. 79

short stories. The brevity and compact nature of the narrative structure of the short story has proved to be the right medium to explore the intricacies and complexities of the East and the West. Rushdie has candidly explored the cultural hybridity and ambivalence between two disparate constructs of East and West. The clever use of the medium of the short fiction has certainly paved the way for exploring the connectedness between disparate cultures in the longer fiction. It becomes a site for reconciliation and not resistance. The East and the West exhibit similar traits. As negative constructs both are biased and liable to commit the fallacy of creating 'imagined geographies' about each other; positively both have the capability of reinventing themselves into new forms that form a point of intersection at the East/West schism.



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