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Aspects Of Edward Said's Orientalism In R. K. Narayan's Malgudi

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Abstract :

Man is born with an insatiable thirst for exploring the untraveled and untouched territories. Orientalism in this sense is the brain child of Europeans who wanted to get into the eastern territories and explore the East. According to Said, the West labels these societies as a static and undeveloped. Western society is developed, rational, flexible and superior. This book reviews the history of this idea and how it's still prevalent today. Western people fabricated views of Eastern nations. Western nations falsified information about the East for their own.

The contradiction is compared and juxtaposed with Edward Said's projection of the Orient and Occidents. Narayan expresses the gradual intrusion of the Orient's consciousness into the Occident's conscience in the form of civilization and cultural advancement. Malgudi faces unending clashes between the civilized and uncivilized, between the ancient and the modern, between the strong and weak, between the blacks and the whites, between the hierarchy and subaltern, between the named and the nameless and between the east and the West. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft describes "all the culture attacked by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the contemporary day" (Ashcroft 2).

Keywords: Subaltern, Hierarchy, Colonialism, Orientalism and Occidentalism

Introduction

Malgudians have adapted the better Occidents than choosing the better Orient on account of the considerable better image created by the western civilization.

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They have become one with the western culture. In his *Orientalism* Edward Said comes up with all types of encounters concerning domestic life, clashes between tradition and modernity as juxtaposed by the East and West, the old and new. "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experience. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over" (*Orientalism* 1).

In the novels of R. K. Narayan the characters are Malgudians deeply rooted in the age old local traditions. It has a distinct personality of its own Malgudi is a symbol of contemporary India. This is a small town with its high school, cricket ground, temple and market place. In due course acquires a film studio, a road bridge on the river, a college and other amenities of modern civilization. The protagonist of different novels like Chandran in *Bachelor of Arts*, Krishna in *The English Teacher*, Margayya in *Financial Expert*, Raju in *The Guide* are the living personalities of Malgudi. Gupta says "Narayan acknowledges the influence of Gandhi's personality on the ordinary people in *Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Vendor of Sweets*, for his heroes are not outstanding in any way but reflect the mood of that period" (Gupta 23).

The people of Malgudi have strong faith on the traditions and customs. The place is full of chaos. Husbands are betrayed by their wives, men are captivated by the false beauty of the actresses and female sex. There are children revolting against parents and the old ways of life. People are not heroic. They are helpless creatures torn by desire. There seems to be a controlling force, a divine force which controls everything. Chandran of *The Bachelor of Arts* at last run away from home, Mr. Sampath is impelled by fortune and at last leaves Malgudi. *The English Teacher* finds happiness from the world of spirits after the death of his wife. *The Guide* dies as a ruined man. The people are merely the puppets in the hands of fate. The ultimate fate seems to be the dwellers of Malgudi. If they are defeated they become Sanyasis.

The concept of Edward Said *Orientalism* and *Occidentalism* is projected through R. K. Narayan's Malgudi. Civilized and uncivilized are the burning conflicts in the fictional world of Narayan where the gradual captivation of a new civilization gradually suppresses the ancient countries and their traditional values. The new civilization affects not only the people but also their culture and customs. Said says "the Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture" (*Orientalism* 2). Malgudi is sandwiched between two contradictions caused by past beliefs, culture and superstitions of the one hand, fascination and charm of the modern life style on the other hand. Malgudi shows a clear view of the background of a transforming Indian society. The progression affects the place culturally and socially. The on-going transformation induced by the Westerner slowly but surely erodes the traces of orthodox traditional values with nothing much left.

Malgudians are the typical group of people with age-old ideology and attitude. They are deep rooted in religious beliefs customs and traditions. Their norms are based on the elements of their religion. Whereas the image projected by Occidental civilization, religion in the Orient is rather a set of superstitious beliefs than a way of life. The Occidents assumed that religion coupled with horoscopes and rituals are just a blinded manifestation of traditional dominance. In the eyes of Orient marriage is done in heaven and sanctified on the earth. Wedding is processed only after the consultation of the hooscopes. But in the eyes of the Occidents marriage is the union of two hearts decided not out of fate but out of science and faithful love. The bride and bride groom are not allowed to meet before their marriage. But the Occidents believe that the ceremonial knot will not be joyful unless they meet each other.

This ancient and traditional practice forms a hindrance for the Orientals to think broadly into the reality of life. On these behavioral contexts the western civilization has confirmed that the East is not capable of being them. The existence of Malgudi lies on two stands: on the age old beliefs and the psychological manipulation and the westernized way of living with its orthodox Indian values the modern civilization come in all manifestations raising a flutter here and there disturbing the quite waters of Malgudi life. In *The Dark Room*, the hero Ramani who owns a Chevrolet car takes Shanta Bai for pleasure to the River Sarayu. Ramani has “his own Chevrolet with its hoarse hooting and it comes in handy when he takes out his mistress Shanta for moonlight drive to the banks of the Sarayu” (DR 6).

The Modern civilisation is established in every nook and corner of the town such as Kabir Street, Vinayaka Mudaliyar Street and finally Anderson lane. Gaffur, the taxi-driver appears in both *The Guide* and *The Painter of Signs*. Mempo forest is the miniature of Mother Nature for the Malgudians. Without mangling the existing culture of the town, Malgudians have upgraded themselves by assimilating the western culture, having understood that the western culture is the only platform by which they can become civilized.

Malgudi has a special flair for the fusion between the Oriental and the Occidental cultures. The wedding dates are fixed by in tune with horoscopes and attractively printed invitation cards. As a tradition, plantain leaves, betel nut and British biscuits are also used on behalf of the occasion. The domination of modernity over the old tradition is seen in the names of the institutions and streets such as, Nallapa's Grove and Albert College, Kabir Street and Lawley Extension, and Mill Street and Bombay Anand Bhawan and Mempo Hills and the Board School. Malgudi is a semi urban place acting like a cultural melting pot where everything is mixed beyond the reproachment. This town Malgudi is projected with many cultures including different aspects of Orientals and Occidentals. Malgudi has slowly moved from the docile, conventional life to the thrilling excitement of the new civilization. Tradition does not come suddenly as a compilation of one generation but it is a gradual practice followed by the people who resided in the past.

Malgudi is the place of amalgamation of Orientalism and Occidentalism. R. K. Narayan is concerned with religion and family. Being born in a Hindu Brahmin family of Madras, he has preserved his religious traits in his writings. Most of his characters are Hindus and they are also Brahmins. Some minor characters are either Christians or Mohammedans. Grace of The Vendor of Sweets, Mr. Ebenezer, Brown in *Swami and Friends* and Mathieson of *Waiting for the Mahatma* are Christians. Aziz, the peon of Albert Mission College and Gaffur, the taxi driver of Malgudi are Muslims. Mostly Hindus occupy the typical South Indian town Malgudi. Very few Christians or Anglo Indians live there. The Muslims are fewer in numbers.

There is no communal tension in the town Malgudi but there is communal harmony people of different religions live together without any feeling of animosity. No man is Island is the dictum of the people in Malgudi. Everything goes on smoothly until the Christian missionaries adopt unfair means to convert Hindus to their religion. They criticize the Hindu way of life. The teachers try to make the students believe that their religion is irrational but Christian religion is rational and scientific. Mr. Ebenezer speaks to his students “why do you worship drims, lifeless wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk?. No. can they see?. No. can they bless you?. No. can they take you to heaven?. No. Why? because they have no life. What did you gods do when Mohammed of Gazni smashed them to pieces?. If

those idol and images had no life, why did they not parry Mohammeds onslaughts?" (SF 26). Swaminathan is not able to control his feelings and his blood boils. The Hindu boys suffer in Christian schools and the Christian missionaries suffer in the street. "Swaminathan is bold enough to question the godliness of Christ; if he was a God, why did he eat flesh and drink wine?" (SF 29). Raju's father does not want to send his son to Albert mission School.

The western impact on Indian life and society is very well depicted in Narayan's novels. Though the western culture has brought many changes in Malgudi, caste and traditional Occupation continue to exist. The old culture and the new culture go hand in hand. Life exists with the balance of binaries. The new never seems to support the old and its elements. The new in fact tries to replace the old with itself which is claimed to be absurdity by Said and the same is projected by Narayan in his novels. There seems to be mutual idea between them. The Narayan's Malgudi delineate the amalgamation of the elements of Occidentalism and Orientalism.

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