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## Representation Of Colonial Conflicts In M M Kaye's 'The Far Pavilions'

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### Abstract:

This paper explores white women's perceptions in selected novels written by British women in India during the 19th century. It is an introspection into the lived experience of the British writers of the times and a representation of their own experience in their writings. It will look at how women British writers have projected the status of women, and gender conflicts so intricately interwoven in the socio- cultural and political conventions during the British Raj. It is an attempt to deal with the portrayal and analysis of colonial society and its representation of India by women novelists of the time. Being in the marginalized position, these women writers asserted their self-hood and differed from their male counterparts in providing paradoxical accounts of colonial rule.

It is interesting to look at the history of colonial life compiled from British women's experience in which women have written differently from men .The paper attempts to explore through some selected novels of British woman writers like M M Kaye, Flora Annie steel and Maud Diver to unravel how differently the writers of the times depict British women's experiences in colonial India .From this perspective, the chosen novel "The Far Pavilion" by M M Kaye addresses the issues of gender, cultural identity, and racism in the colonial context.

**Key words:** cultural identity, gender, racism, colonialism

**Introduction:**

England in the 19th century was one of paramount importance for its history is inextricably connected with the history of most of the world at that time. England slowly emerged as the most powerful colonial country, an imperial nation with a zeal to expand itself engaged in wars all around the globe. The first half of the century was about ruthless territorial acquisition. In the second half of the 19th century, English women's arrival in India marked a significant episode forming the Anglo-Indian community. It was the opening of Suez canal in 1869 that made the English women's travel between England and India easier.

Women's position in the society has always been in question from time immemorial. However, Women's role in the society can be understood from the socio- cultural context of the time. In the 19th century, women in India witnessed gender based attitudes in the society. Education was used as a medium by women pioneers who worked zealously to bring about radical changes in the existing society. So during the 19th century education played a vital role in the emancipation of women. However, women had to pay a price for the courageous mission undertaken in a male dominated society. A remarkable English writer Maud Diver in her collection of articles "The Englishwoman in India"(1909) contains a record of opinions wherein it has sketched the hardships even pioneer women like Pandita Ramabhai, Sorabji Cornelia life narratives talk about the disturbing episodes of gender dynamics.

"She found herself the only girl students amid three hundred men and boys, none of whom had been trained to treat women with respect, consideration, or courtesy; and with one consent they proceeded to make Miss Sorabji's college life as unpleasant for her as they knew how."(page 262)

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century society was gendered, a separate sphere was created for men and women to define their roles thus making men more dominant over women. The white women who came to India set some trends of Victorian culture in women's society in India too. They had to perform a distinctive role in India showing their imperial mission. Needless to say, these women had an opportunity to experience the colonial rule, learn the history of colonial India, and conveyed their observations and experiences in fiction.

M M Kaye was born in Shimla under the British Raj. Her father was serving as an intelligence officer in the Indian Army. Her first hand knowledge and experience of Indian life permeates the narratives thereby serving to look in depth at the Indian cultural and religious life of the times. M M Kaye is best known for her work "The Far Pavilions" published in 1978 which reflects the history of British Raj during the post - Independence India. In her novels, she gives vivid descriptions of life in India under the British Raj exploring the subtle theme of cultural identity through its character and at the same time delving into the complex interplay of different cultures in colonial India. As a remarkable writer, her novels incorporated the cultural richness and complexity of India. The novel taken for study exposes the virtues of colonialism and also mirrors the prevailing imperialistic ideologies of the time.

Kaye's representation of the socio- cultural experience is realistically embedded in the characterization in the novel. To evaluate the novel from all the dimensions a detailed summary would serve the purpose to justify it. In the novel 'The Far Pavilion' the protagonist Ashton Akbar pelham, Ash or Ashok born to English parents, is brought up by an Indian women Sita in the Northern Himalayan state of Gulkote. During the 1857 rebellion, his father Hillary Pelham is killed and he is looked after by Sita, the Indian maidservant, taking on the role of a foster mother who tries to save Ashton during the riots. He becomes instrumental in saving the life of Lalji the prince of Gulkote and thus seeks entry into the palace intrigue. His encounter with Anjuli ,the half caste princess. Though Sita's intentions are noble, the promises made to handover Ashton to his uncle remains unfilled till her death. When Ashton discovers the truth of his identity, he rejects the revelation. His upbringing in the younger days sees

a cultural clash between norms and values. Although he has traveled to England to learn English ways to become a sahib, he is still Ashok son of sita”.

His shifting identities plays a pivotal role in analyzing his character in the novel. The complexities of adapting to a new culture and retaining the native culture in the colonial environment intensify his struggles.

“And there is a wide and fundamental difference between the reasoning of East and West—a fact that has before now confounded many a well-meaning missionary and zealous administrator, and led them to condemn whole nations as immortal and corrupt because their laws and standards, habits and customs differ from those evolved by the Christian West.”(‘The far pavilion’ page 206).

Ashton embodies the intersection of East and West reflecting his struggles to navigate the differences between Eastern and Western values and perspectives. It highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding societies during the colonial period. The idea of culture is thus defined as “how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future”.

Ashton after he discovers his identity is torn between a sense of belonging and self-worth. There are many instances in the novel where he talks about his inability to make decisions like the British officers. He is treated as an outcast in the British as well as the Indian community. Ashton’s troubled identity becomes a significant factor in his decision to live as a social recluse, he struggles to fit into the community constructed which Ashton finds challenging to conform to serves as a crucial element in the narrative of the novel.

As he befriends Wally- he seems to learn to think of himself as a sahib or Englishman, ‘A stateless person.’ A citizen of no-man’s land’ (Kaye p256)

At the same time portrayal of Anjuli, a central female character also suffers for being half-caste torn between two different cultures. She too like Ashton encounters discrimination thereby limiting her prospects for marriage and societal recognition.

“Shushila must be married first—and to a ruling prince, when that was done he would dispose of Kairi to some less important personage; for as well as getting on in years she was no beauty: a tall, gawky woman with high cheekbones, a big mouth and the hands of a working woman or a European”.

These issues highlight the broader issues of racism, identity struggles as she navigates a complex terrain of cultural expectations and biases.

In Kaye’s novel, “The Far Pavilion” the role of white women in the colonial enterprise is represented in diverse ways. Memsahibs are held responsible for creating social barriers between white men and brown in the territories of the Raj. After the Memsahib’s arrival in India Indians who had hitherto been treated as equals became “natives”, signifying members of an inferior—and coloured race. Their menfolk no longer married Indian brides or kept mistresses, while exhibiting greatest scorn for the half castes.

“He brushed her hand from his arm and broke into a run, leaving Belinda to stare after him, startled and more than a little shocked by the sight of her betrothed publicly embracing a strange native... (Kaye, page 157)

The Memsahibs are also sometimes projected as figures of stern authority when interacting with “native”

As used by the French writer Simone De Beauvoir the concept of the “Other” describes women’s status in patriarchal androcentric cultures. Women are seen as the other being defined ‘only in relation to men’. This notion helps to consider the role of characters how they interact with those perceived as different, emphasizing cultural,

social or personal distinctions. To quote a line from the novel when princess Sushila's behaviour on the occasion had been frenzied in the Zenana, and it was only her elder brother under whose intervention situations are brought under control.

“As Maharaj of Karidkote as well as elder brother he was doubly in authority over her, but mostly because he was a man...Every Indian woman was taught that her first duty was obedience: and there was no woman, and no Zenana in all the land, that was not under the unquestioned control of some man”(Kaye,1978, p356)

The character of princess Shushila, her identity and status are intricately linked to her role as a woman within the royal and patriarchal structures. As women, they are prepared from childhood to undergo this custom, widespread among the high caste Hindus, in which a woman must sacrifice herself by burning at the stake after the death of her husband.

“Shushila was only five when she was taken to see the hand prints on the Sutee Gate-you remember it?- and told that if she herself were ever widowed, she must burn herself on her husband's pyre. Thereafter she was made to stir boiling rice with her little finger, in order to teach her to bear fire without flinching.”(Kaye,1978,p359).

After her husband's death, a woman's very existence becomes a question and she is judged based on traditional gender norms. It is emphasized that the importance of women's role is assessed within the framework of societal expectations and more specifically, in relation to men.

Kaye skillfully portrays the complexity of Indian and British characters, challenging conventional stereotypes and highlighting the multifaceted nature of humanity. The aspects of gender can be seen from various aspects in the novel.

Joan Scott's definition of gender is based on two propositions. “Gender is a constitute element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and the second one asserts that gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated (Scott 1069).

The struggle women undergo in asserting their role, challenging the societal norms are vividly described throughout the novel. For example James Mill wrote ‘In the History of British India’ (1818) “Among rude people the women are generally degraded, among civilized people they are exalted” (p293)

India was proven to be barbaric with forced practices like suttee, widowhood, early marriage, and female infanticide, demonstrating the existence of barbaric treatment of women in society. It was at this juncture the colonizers used religion and cultural practices as a means to legitimize their colonial rule in India.

“An English law”, scoffed Anjuli. “Have you really become so much an Angrezi that you believe your people have to say ‘it is forbidden, for such old customs as this to cease immediately? for this is too vast for a handful of ferighis to keep watch over. Only when women themselves refuse to submit to this custom will it cease.”(Kaye, p 360)

**Conclusion:** M M Kaye's *The Far Pavilions* is a historical novel that provides a framework for understanding the historical perspectives; with issues of gender and cultural identities, racism, and cross cultural exploration in a colonial setting. The characters in the novel are used very subtly to depict the historical events throughout the political history of the British colonial rule in India in the 19th century.

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