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Realism V.s Idealism Reference to the Novels of E.M. Forster and George Orwell

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Abstract: Blending realism with idealism for defending humanism is the common theme explored by Forster and Orwell their novels. While wishing for a utopian state is the characteristic of impractical dreamers, these two writers imply better future through mutual understanding and bilateral respect. This study aims at scrutinizing the major themes related to realism and idealism in the novels of these two writers. The research methodology is going to be descriptive-analytic with its main focus on cultural aspects. This study is important as it helps the readers to shape a suitable lifestyle within the postmodern world. To conclude, Forster and Orwell have depicted a hopeful perspective for the future while they knew how much the world was messed up.

Index Terms - Realism, Idealism, Culture, Postmodern Age

I. INTRODUCTION

Every author has his obsessive ideas, themes and images which persist throughout the entire body of his work. In a way he is also a product of specific culture. Indeed, it would be probably impossible for most writers to work without such enduring preoccupations. Such a philosophical background gives meaning and coherence to each individual production by setting it within a larger frame of references.

These two writers were, of course, no exceptions to this rule. Their novels are replete with themes which reflect the cultural identity of their time. Anand B. Patil refers to cultural identity as 'the manner in which the forces of semiotics of culture and cultural politics are at work in shaping the personality of an individual.' There is a close relationship between culture and identity. As Homi K. Bhabha observes:

Culture is less about expressing a pre-given identity (whether the source is national culture or 'ethnic' culture) and more about the activity of negotiating, regulating and authorizing competing, often conflicting demands for collective self-representation. (2)

This means that identity goes beyond the logic of country borders. Indeed, the interlinking of culture with identity is of vital importance as it gives a collective representation of all the members of the cultural affinity. In order to gain proper perspectives, we have to define these two major concepts adequately again. They will be more useful in the analysis of some of the themes related to culture and imperialism in many ways.

II. Definitions of Theme:

It is always believed that content and form cannot be separated. This is an age old debate in criticism. A single theme cannot stand alone. It is a network of various themes that goes in making of a theme. A theme is the soul of a novel, its very essence. Comparatists insist upon the significance of thematic study as a means of showing not only how a theme might appear and disappear across cultures as part of study of history, but also as a means of attempting to unravel why that process might take place.

Thematic has become a separate branch of study. Indeed, thematic approach is used in comparative literature, because the most important reason for reading literature is to think about the conditions of the human life. Without that concern the study of literature can easily become an arid game of trivial fact. It should be noted that the words, moral and theme are not interchangeable. The theme of a work of art is its writer's view of life as well as his/her obsessive ideas and preoccupations. It is the central message, idea, concern or purpose of the writer which is not directly presented to the readers. According to Max. M. Louwerse and Willie Van Peer:

Theme refers to what a text or discourse is about, its main idea, its subject or topic. Several other terms are somewhat synonymous to theme, including topos, Stoff (as in Stoff geschichte), figure, topic, gist, upshot, and point. Themes are often related to some human activity, are directly involved in human interests and concerns, or tend to be emotionally charged. (3)

This implies that the thematic pattern can be a complex network. The subject or topic refers to the theme of a literary work.

III. Thematic

The study of the theme in a creative art involves multi-disciplinary approaches. Thematic is a science of the study of themes and motifs in text. The concept of theme was explained earlier. Thematic enriches one's understanding of the nature of theme and its action. Indeed, using a thematic approach is a great way to cover a variety of topics related to a major topic or unit. The impetus in thematic research came from folklorists investigating the universality of folktales.

Thematic became an interdisciplinary study as several disciplines such as literary studies, text linguistics, psychology, cognitive science and computational linguistics combined their efforts for studying the themes. Max. M. Louwerse and Willie Van Peer define thematic as follows:

Thematic is the study of themes and motifs in text and discourse. It deals with textual elements and the inferences and the processes underlying their construction and maintenance. Because the elements, inferences and processes lie at the crossroads of various disciplines, the study of themes must be carried out at the interface of these disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, (art) history and literary studies. (4)

This shows how "thematic" is related to various disciplines. The convergence of humanities and the linguistic sciences is applied to the interpretation, investigation and analysis of the literary texts. The sociological investigation of Forster's "middle class men and women" illustrates another direction of the thematic. It mainly focuses on the narratives due to their homogenous nature. Thematic as interdisciplinary line of research with its own studies on theme has never disappeared from other disciplines. Let us now discuss the nature and scope of 'thematic' with special reference to the novels of these two writers.

IV. List of Major Themes related to Cultural Realism and Idealism:

The next section is divided into two parts. In the first part, there are themes related to culture which include religion, sex and human connections. The second part deals with the themes related to imperialism which are colonialism, racism, class and social stratifications.

V. Detailed Discussion:

The detailed illustrative discussion on themes related to culture begins with the section on religion. Indeed, their disapproval of having a blind faith in religion expresses their cultural motto that 'cherish the body and you will cherish the soul'. (5)

5.1 Culture and Religion:

These two writers were neither religious men nor religious writers. Their disapproval of having a blind faith in any religion or school of thought is persistently depicted in their literary works of art. For example, in *Burmese Days* Orwell rejects superstition and any kind of false belief based on ignorance. This is depicted in the following dialogue between U.Po Kyin and Ma Kin:

[Ma Kin]: Yes. They are very foolish, those villagers. What can they do with their dahs and spears against the Indian soldiers? They will be shot down like wild animals.

[U.Po. Kyin]: Of course. If there is any fighting it will be a massacre. But they are only a pack of superstitious peasants. They have put their faith in these absurd bullet-proof jackets that are being distributed to them. I despise such ignorance. (6)

In the above cited lines, Orwell reveals the superiority complex of U.Po. Kyin who, in turn, feels inferior to his own British masters. It is indisputable that both culture and religion have great effects on each other. To be brief, religion is a belief system that is related to the worship of a controlling power. At the same time, culture is based on the knowledge that one acquires during his or her growing stages in a certain social group at certain time in history. Culture adjusts itself to the other aspects of life and takes different shapes and characteristics in different time and places.

However, religion is similar to the legal system of a country and is contained in a book. So, in contrast to culture, it is much easier to use religion to inculcate the goodness and badness of the things, as there is always a reference for proving it. Forster's faith was not Faith, or Belief, which was ascribed to any religion.

As an agnostic writer, he believed that humans are not supposed to be categorized or classified into any religious systems. Moreover, Forster made a distinction between 'belief' and 'Belief' in that while he ascribed to the former, he distrusted the latter. He states, 'They [Christians] have Faith, with a large F. My Faith has a very small one, and I only intrude it because these are strenuous and serious days, and one likes to say what one thinks while speech is comparatively free' (7).

The twentieth century spirit of interrogation and scientific inquiry affected cultural concepts. Forster believed that truth is evasive and can be seized only in fragments. According to him, 'The human mind is not a dignified organ, and I do not see how we can exercise it sincerely except through eclecticism. There is no such person as a philosopher; no one is detached; the observer, like the observed, is in chains' (8).

Forster believed in the inner deficiencies of religious ideologies. He denied himself the hope of seeing life either steadily or as a whole. He admitted the incompleteness of the conclusions that one may draw in life. For example, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* he mocks Lilia's religious belief that her marriage is a failure only because it has not been done according to the rules of the Church of England. He writes:

She [Lilia] reflected chiefly about her marriage. The ceremony had been hasty and expensive, and the rites, whatever they were, were not those of the Church of England. Lilia had no religion in her; but for hours at a time she would be seized with a vulgar fear that she was not "married properly," and that her social position in the next

world might be as obscure as it was in this. It might be safer to do the thing thoroughly, and one day she took the advice of Spiridione and joined the Roman Catholic Church, or as she called it, "Santa Deodata's." (9)

This shows that nothing is worse than false beliefs which are institutionalized in the individual's mind and have the potential for harm. Indeed, it was only the subject of man's innate limitations on which Forster was dogmatic. He observes, 'We cannot understand each other, except in a rough and ready way; we cannot reveal ourselves, even when we want to; what we call intimacy is only a makeshift; perfect knowledge is an illusion' (10).

In the above cited lines, Forster shows that we are not even in a position to judge our knowledge of the characters of a fiction or to assume that we know ourselves perfectly and use ourselves as a standard. He points out, 'Faith, to my mind, is a stiffening process, a sort of mental starch, which ought to be applied as sparingly as possible... I do not believe in it for its own sake at all' (11).

Though both the writers disapproved of having a blind faith in anything, religion was a recurring theme in their fictions. In fact, they disapproved of fanaticism in all its shapes and manifestations. For them, Christianity, in general, was a fanatic ideology. They were caught between two worlds: the world of traditional Christian belief and the world of modern scientific reason, one dead, and the other powerless to be born. Forster's motto, as he wrote in *Abinger Harvest*, was 'cherish the body and you will cherish the soul.' (12) This was against Christian ideology which stressed the 'weaving away the body by penance, in order that the quivering soul may be exposed.' (13) He states:

No form of Christianity and no alternative to Christianity will bring peace to the world or integrity to the individual no 'change of heart' will occur. And yet we need not despair, indeed, we cannot despair; the evidence of history shows us that men have always insisted on behaving creatively under the shadow of sword; that they have done their artistic and scientific and domestic stuff for the sake of doing it and that we had better follow their example under the shadow of the aero planes. (14)

In the above quotation, Forster asserts that the creative urge of human beings has been functioning under the shadow of swords. The same pattern will be repeated when men will work under the shadow of airplanes in the present times. There is no need to despair. Forster goes on to state, 'I cannot believe that Christianity will ever cope with the present world-wide mess, and I think that such influence as it retains in modern society is due to the money behind it, rather than to its spiritual appeal. It was a spiritual force once, but the indwelling spirit will have to be restated if it is to calm the waters again, and probably restated in a Christian form' (15)

In the foregoing discussion, Forster makes it clear that religion has no appeal to the contemporary world. Once, religion had a great spiritual influence on the people and their worldview. However, the monetary and commercial culture of the present world ridicules religious belief in any way. Forster mocks nationalism as the religious creed of modern world.

In a world where national identity has become increasingly racialized, religion has lost its value and dignity. For example, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster satirizes Harriet's blind faith to everything outside the Sawston conventions which is rooted in her religious fanaticism. This is reflected in the following dialogue between Philip and Harriet:

[Philip]: Don't you think it's better than sitting in all the evening and getting nervous?

[Harriet]: Mother wouldn't like it. It would be most unsuitable-- almost irreverent. Besides all that, foreign theatres are notorious. Don't you remember those letters in the 'Church Family Newspaper'?" (16)

As a religious fanatic, Harriet is unapproachable in her beliefs. According to her brother, Philip, she has 'bolted all the cardinal virtues and [can't] digest them.' (17) Cumhur Yilmaz Madran observes:

Like Charlotte in *A Room with a View*, Harriet is continually associated with closed windows and with a closed inlaid, which means she is afraid of looking out. She is a strict, narrow-minded and conventional young woman..., her feelings and speeches about Italy are full of hatred, extremely bitter and hostile because of her strict religious feelings. Harriet detaches herself from Italy through her strict way of life. Harriet, who has an uncomprehending mind and who is not sensitive to the virtues around her, cannot understand Italy and the Italians. She condemns both of them. (18)

In the foregoing quotation, the contradiction between Harriet's attitude to life and those of Italian's is most apparent. Unlike the strict atmosphere of England, Italy is the land of music and laughter. It is the place where high spirits bound back and forth. Now we will scrutinize the writers' attitudes towards sex and love in their novels.

5.2 Sex and Love

The writers' treatment of sex and love in their novels is a matter of concern. As literature evolves over time, the themes and literary devices central to it change accordingly.

Passion and personal desires have always been the major themes explored by these two writers in their novels. They were deeply preoccupied with the questions of gender identities, passion and repressed sexuality in their literary works of art.

The major theme of Forster's novels is the individual's reactions to the established norms of their culture and society. Forster aimed at showing how the characters' deviations from the conventional rules of society will eventually lead into their understanding of their gender identities.

Forster's writings stretch across the late Victorian age to the early modern period when different social, cultural and ideological changes took place. He was a writer whose mind was nurtured by the challenges of his time. In his novels, Forster depicts the pervasiveness of the Victorian cultural structure and the Edwardian mixed set of cultural values in a unique and creative manner. During the Victorian Age, passion was regarded as unnatural desire which had to be suppressed. Victorians believed that sexuality was deviant and any reflection on the issue would cause insanity. While the basic foundations of Victorian culture were slackened by the interrogating tendencies of modernism, their effects were still operating in the early twentieth century. This is why there is no description of sex, be it figuratively or literally, in the writings of Forster while human affairs and their transformations were the most important topics for him. Laura Spearot tries to show how sexual contact is presented in different literary forms, particularly in Forster's book *Howards End*. She writes, 'Interestingly, in [the novels of] Forster sex is almost not described at all. By studying the evolving course of this literary theme we will be able to explore why the theme may have evolved this way, what this then says about the themes evolutionary history in the past and its future and how the evolution of this theme relates to mankind' (19).

The foregoing discussion shows that Forster is more concerned with the intellectual awakening of his characters than with their emotional involvement. In his novels, Forster investigates the superior effects of foreign settings on the instinctual awakening of his characters. Robert K. Martin describes Forster's usage of the Mediterranean settings as follows, 'Throughout most of his stories, Forster opposes a Greek world to a more modern, English world, or in some cases, an Italian, Mediterranean world to a northern, Anglo-Saxon world. His use of the Italian theme is almost identical to that of Henry James, who consistently opposed the sensuality and moral complexity of Italy to the materialism and moral simplicity of England' (20).

This reveals the difference between the Mediterranean freedom and English conventionality as depicted by Forster in his Italian novels. In his novels, Forster draws a line between the sensuality and moral complexity of Italian culture and the materialistic culture of England. For example, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Mediterranean setting is, in the words of Adams, 'the stimulus to the physical, instinctive self.' (21). Indeed, English conventionality and Mediterranean freedom are two opposing factors in his early writings. Lionel Trilling refers to Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* as the 'novel of sexuality' (22). He describes its theme as the 'effect of a foreign country and a strange culture upon insular ideas and provincial personalities.' He points out, 'Where Angels Fear to Tread is a novel of learning and growth.... It is the story of questioning, disillusionment and conversion. It is a criticism of the great middle class. It is a novel of sexuality' (23).

In this novel, opposites tend toward a unity. Yet Lilia and Gino are not united. It is because Forster's use of love is not a mutual one. However, his outlook to the internal conflict of his characters made him to penetrate into the feminine psyche. His psychological analysis of the characters makes him take his keen interest in the human nature. This can be better examined in Forster's description of Gino's disloyalty in love. Forster states:

The discovery of his infidelity – which she made by accident – destroyed such remnants of self-satisfaction as he life might yet possess. She broke down utterly, and sobbed and cried in Perfetta's arms. She had given up everything for him – her daughter, her relatives, her friends, all the little comforts and luxuries of a civilized life – and even if she had the courage to break away, there was no one who would receive her now. (24)

In the above quotation, Forster reveals a totally different idea of marital obligations in Italian culture. Whereas Lilia desires love and the unity of body and soul, Gino is still not conscious of the inner strength of love and is still given to outer life.

Forster's chief concern was the unity of body and soul and the harmony between the inner and the outer life. For example, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* Lilia discovers the singular importance of true love and the unity of body and soul. On the other hand, Gino is neither lustful nor passionate in his love and sexuality. Forster writes:

His [Gino's] one desire was to become the father of a man like himself, and it held him with a grip he only partially understood, for it was the first great desire, the first great passion of his life. Falling in love was a mere physical triviality, like warm sun or cool water, beside this divine hope of immortality: 'I continue'. (25)

In *A Room with a View*, Lucy Honeychurch's relationship with music puts her in touch with her suppressed passions and desires. To this, Mrs. Beebe comments: 'If Miss Honey Church even takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting both for her and her.' (26)

This shows Lucy's movement from her suppressed passion toward direct desire and materiality by means of art and musicality. Forster explores the theme of music and its power to stimulate passion and transcend it beyond social and cultural barriers. According to Alicia Buxton:

Lucy's passionate playing of music reveals her subconscious desires and hidden motives, and perhaps the "storm" that she will encounter through the course of the novel. In fact, the way in which Lucy is described playing the piano likens her frequent immersion in music with her repressed sexuality and that implies her ripeness for experience. In spite of the existing prejudices and proprieties in the world, Forster suggests that prosperity and well-being is within the grasp of every one. (27)

The above cited lines reveal the sexual restrictions and cultural conventions of the British society. Forster values truthfulness and urges the people to be honest with each other. In this novel, Forster shows how suppressed sexuality and cultural restrictions make Lucy to marry Cecil.

Forster portrays true love and passion through the character of Mr. Emerson. He targets the British society for its prudishness and stuffiness. For him the real enemies of love and passion are propriety and convention.

He believes that alienation and solitude originate in repressed sexuality and social restrictions. Forster remarks: 'We find for more than Love or Pleasure, there is Truth. Truth counts, Truth does count.' (28)

Together with sexuality, class, gender, empire, suburbia and the city are the themes which run consistently throughout Forster's work and never operate independently from each other. Robert K. Martin and George Piggford write:

Even an ostensibly 'heterosexual' text such as *A Room with a View* sees sexuality as a potentially destabilizing force that undermines class and convention. Here, 'class' or 'gender' could be the operative terms since these things subvert the status quo and are subverted by other thematic elements in Forster's works. (29)

This suggests that sex is not the only major theme of this novel. Even in *A Room with a View*, class and gender are the operative terms. However, one can not discover the constant relationships between these dominant social forces in *A Room with a View* in a cursory glance. Audrey Lavin observes:

As we read *A Room with a View* the first time for pleasure, there is not a pattern constantly before us as in an oriental rug. As we reread it, however, we wonder how we could have missed its obvious design. The answer is that Forster has seamlessly woven his story and pattern together.... Once it has been seen, we can follow Forster's lead in conceptualizing the patterns of the novels by drawing a simple scheme of this one. (30)

The foregoing discussion shows how personal relationships are interlinked with the dominant social and cultural values in *A Room with a View*. For Forster, love is an intellectualization of the biological urges of the human organism. In other words, it is an evolved part of the emotions surrounding sexuality. In *A Passage to India*, sexual tension underlies conversation between Aziz and Mrs. Moore in the mosque. The lustful nature of Aziz is revealed to us through his interaction with Mrs. Moore in front of the mosque. It is the superiority complex and racial consciousness that determine the idea of love and sex. Forster's idea of love as a social construct is implied in the following passage as he states, 'Advancing, he [Aziz] found that she [Mrs. Moore] was old. A fabric bigger than the mosque fell to pieces and he did not know whether he was glad or sorry. She was older than Hamiddullah Begum, with a red face and white hair. Her voice had deceived him' (31).

Aziz's discovery of Mrs. Moore's being an old woman shows how for E. M. Forster love is a social construct. The conflict between passion and social conventions is the central theme of Forster's novels.

In this novel, characters are often caught between their personal desires and the cultural restraints of their society. As a theme, sexuality has undergone a general shift from heterosexual love to homosexual love in Forster's novels. He explored this theme especially well due to his own homosexuality. His characters always buck the conventional rules and the cultural values of their societies.

To be brief, the themes of love and sex in their novels mirror the cultural values of their age. Let us now investigate the writers' treatments of the themes of separateness and connection in their novels.

5.3 Separateness versus Connection:

Both the writers have explored these themes from different social, economic, political and cultural perspectives. Forster's outlook on the world was developed in the Edwardian period and it had passed through the subsequent years of turbulence and cataclysm. His novels also touch upon many issues surrounding Edwardian society and its culture. V.A. Shahane observes:

Forster is 'rare' because he is in part of late Victorian or an Edwardian and in part a modern. His life extends over a long period – from 1879 to 1970 – marked by rapid and radical social change..., however, it is not so much this uncommon relationship to the age that makes Forster so unique as the inherent qualities of his personality, mind and art. (32)

This reveals the relationship between Forster and the culture of his society which is also depicted in his literary works of art. His life of ninety-one years passed through the Victorian, the Edwardian, the inter-war times and the modern age, but his creative period, in particular, is during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Similarly, Orwell's novels are the cultural products of the thirties. He was a humanist whose writings were primarily concerned with how individuals are affected by the social and cultural constructions. As a matter of fact, the peak of Orwell's career, the 1930s and 1940s, were conceived as a period notable for the sustained intersection of politics and art.

A place could be made for the literary writer in the important public debates of the time because, in the words of Judge Richard Posner, 'the literary imagination is equated to the possession of a social conscience' (33). Both Forster and Orwell shared realistic ideas on England on an intellectual level. They recognized both her greatness and her flaws and also the need for cultural reform and social change for the benefit of the commoner.

For them, the knowledge of humanity was more urgently needed than any other kind of knowledge. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Mrs. Herriton acts as Forster's mouthpiece when she emphasizes on the close relationship between culture and society. This is depicted in the following conversation between Philip and her:

[Mrs. Herriton]: Then you were still infatuated with Italy. It may be full of beautiful pictures and churches, but we cannot judge a country by anything but its men."

[Philip]: "That is quite true," he said sadly. And as the tactics were now settled, he went out and took an aimless and solitary walk. (34)

They observed that all the social and ideological attempts to liberate the mankind were in vain. That is so because the locus of all these efforts – which is the human being – has remained unknown, or been forgotten in one way or another. According to Alexis Carrel, 'To the same extent that man has been occupied with the external world and has achieved progress there, he has become distanced from himself and has forgotten his own reality' (35).

The above cited lines reveal the fragmentation and nihilism of Western civilization and its negative effects on the cultural estrangement of the individuals. Both the writers were chiefly the novelists of ideas who illustrated the same point in their novels.

They recognized the merits as well as demerits of their culture and society. Both the novelists desired to expose the significance of the predicament of man and reveal his central position in the world. Indeed, one cannot abandon the attempt to achieve the knowledge of man. Ali Shariati has pointed out:

We are enveloped in such a darkness of self-ignorance that the shining lamp of science, awareness is incapable of guiding us anywhere. The knowledge of man is required since it is mainly the lack of it which culminates in widening the cultural gaps among the people as well as the nations. (36)

The foregoing discussion suggests that the lack of human knowledge is the root cause of cultural gaps among the nations. Both the writers strived to bridge such gaps in their novels. In all their works, they tried to tackle with the themes of personal relations, their repressions and their conflicts.

For example, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster explores these themes through the possibility of unity. In this regard, Marital Rose has remarked that, 'much of Forster's work is a study of personal relationships concerned for the larger world and its modes of government and glad to be living himself in a democracy' (37).

This means that cultural differences can hamper the ways of personal and national relationships. Forster deals with both the types of relationships in his English and his Italian novels.

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster treats the topics of Edwardian culture and society with poignancy and humor. He calls for the integration of reason and emotion. He hopes to heal the split between the head and the heart. Dharmachari Abhaya explains that in Forster's works, 'it is not a question of one or the other, reason or emotion, prose or passion, the outer life or the inner life, but of finding a middle way between them' (38).

Forster wished to integrate the reason with emotion. This is illustrated in his novels such as *A Room with a View*. In this novel, Forster contrasts the customs, beliefs and the cultural ideologies of England with Italy. It is a comedy of manners that farcically shows how the cultural clashes can turn into tragedy.

In other words, Forster weaves an exciting and eventful tale that intriguingly contrasts English and Italian sensibilities. Here, Forster compares the vibrant, free life of the Italians with the artificial, hypocritical life of the British people. Let us recapitulate our main findings in the next part of this essay.

6. conclusion

This essay was devoted to the discussion of treatment of themes. It was rather difficult to sort out the overlapping themes for comparisons. It was noticed that the themes do travel and change according to the cultural as well as colonial contexts.

For example, the superiority and inferiority complexes provide a frame of references which determine these characters and themes in different contexts. The colonial consciousness revealed in the treatment of these themes is one more separate topic for further research. It can be seen that the microscopic treatment cannot be given in such a preliminary comparative cultural study.

There are lots of similarities in the writers' treatment of major and minor themes in their novels. Shiva M. Pandeya compares the final image of Kipling, Forster and Orwell of the imperial myth. According to Pandeya 'Kipling's was a eulogistic judgment on the myth, Forster's a humanistic exposure of it, and Orwell's is a satiric anatomy of the subject' (39).

While Forster gently exposes the myth of the Western superiority, Orwell attempts to clinically dissect the malady of the Western imperialism in his novels. In the present essay different themes related to culture and imperialism were discussed and illustrated in the novels of these two novelists.

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