

“The Place of Memory and Memory of Place”: A Comparative Study of Anglo-Indian Literature and Indian-English Literature

This paper will discuss E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India (1924) and Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy (1991). It will use the concept made fashionable by Clive James (2007) that he labels as Cultural Amnesia. It will delve into the cultural aspects of India that are presented in both novels. The discussion will centre on the setting and characters that portray the displaced memories of history and place in both novels. The glory of the half-remembered Indian past will be discussed in this study that is present in both texts. How the characters live in the India that is in the texts and yearn for the glorious Mughal age will be analyzed using the concept of Cultural Amnesia. The British classic A Passage to India and the Indian Magnum Opus A Suitable Boy offer its readers a retrospect of the Indian past. The twain meets through both novels of the memory of the West and India with regards to the Indian glorious past. The memory that Forster could not evoke of and about India is brilliantly evoked by Seth. Thus, this paper will discuss how both texts can be used to trigger research on cultural amnesia and cure it in India and in the Indian diasporas worldwide.

Keywords: E.M. Forster, Vikram Seth, memories, cultural amnesia, India, diasporas

Introduction

This paper will discuss E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924) and Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1991). It will use the concept made fashionable by Clive James (2007) that he labels as Cultural Amnesia. It will delve into the cultural aspects of India that are presented in both novels. The discussion will centre on the setting and characters that portray the displaced memories of history and place in both novels. The glory of the half-remembered Indian past will be discussed in this study that is present in both texts. How the characters live in the India that is in the texts and yearn for the glorious Mughal age will be analyzed using the concept of Cultural Amnesia. The British classic *A Passage to India* and the Indian Magnum Opus *A Suitable Boy* offer its readers a retrospect of the Indian past. The twain meets through both novels of the memory of the West and India with regards to the Indian glorious past. The memory that Forster could not evoke of and about India is brilliantly evoked by Seth. Thus, this paper will discuss how both texts can be used to trigger research on cultural amnesia and cure it in India and in the Indian diasporas worldwide.

This research will concentrate on the cultural aspects that are present in both novels. According to Halimah Mohamed Ali and Aina Nabila Ahmad (2018), “The research on culture most of the time goes hand in hand with the

research on literature. This is because literature itself is a very important branch in cultural studies” (p. 73431). They rationalize that,

An important thrust in culture consists of traditional aspects (through acquired or selected history), ideas and values as well as cultural systems that can be regarded as action products or as conditional elements for future action. The culture of a nation is regarded as a national identity and a country that involves all components of the nation and should be supported with the awareness of every element of society (p. 73431).

Forster and Seth represent the culture of a nation. Although *A Passage to India* is a colonial text it can be read as a representation of Indian cultures and values as presented by a Western colonizer. Seth as Halimah Mohamed Ali (2011) has discussed in her book *Orientalism from Within: Arundhati Roy and Her Contemporaries* has carried on with the colonial project of Orientalism; that is of Othering the native. According to her when a native intellectual does it, it becomes more viable because the native intellectual becomes a reliable narrator of his own culture and people because he is an insider from within his/her society. However, this research is not out to prove that Forster othered the Indians and Seth carried on the project of the colonizer. If this research comes to that conclusion then it will be because the evidence from the selected texts prove towards that.

Cultural Amnesia

This research discusses the crisis of memory that is present in Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993) when set against E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924). Both texts will be read through Andrea Huyssen’s book titled *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (1995). His concept of time and memory will be used to analyze both texts in the context of the past and the present as paradoxes to each other and *A Passage to India* as complimenting the memories of India that are present in *A Suitable Boy*. The nostalgia of an Indian who views India as a romantic place where he was born and where his forefathers struggled for independence against the British colonizers will be discussed. *A Passage to India* helps support and give light to the cultural amnesia that Seth is fighting against and trying to cure in himself and in the Indians per se.

This research will compare Indian cultural elements that are present in Forster’s *A Passage to India* against Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* and determine whether the Indian author is suffering from cultural amnesia. It will analyze the problems of cultural amnesia inherent in the text as well as critically examine how Seth heals his nation’s cultural amnesia via his writing. According to Mohamed Ali and Ahmad (2018),

To understand the concept of culture amnesia effectively, the knowledge of the 'cultural' and 'amnesia' terms should be specifically addressed. In epistemology, culture or civilization carries broad and complex meaning from the ethnographic aspect of knowledge, customs and beliefs, arts, morals, laws and all the skills and attitudes that a society has. While the term amnesia, based on the Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology: A-E, Vol. 1 is described as follows. In current common use, amnesia (from the Greek for forgetfulness) refers loosely and interchangeably to either one or two quite different states or both of them. First, it refers to a state in which memories that were available to recall in the past have been lost and is no longer available for recall in the present. Second, it refers to a state in which current experiences are not being kept account of and duly recorded, which result that they will not be available for recall in the future. The first usage is reflected in the Oxford English dictionary definition of amnesia as "loss of memory" and roughly coincides with retrograde amnesia, whereas the second usage is reflected in the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition as "forgetfulness. (C.D Spielberg, 2004: 130). In summary, amnesia refers to a person who lost memory in the past or was unable to remember things in the present situation. From a particular study of the meaning of 'culture' and 'amnesia' in particular, the New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy Third Edition defines cultural amnesia as, "A loss of memory, especially one brought on by some distressing or shocking experience." Whereas Epp Jerlei, through a thesis titled "Cultural Amnesia: Imagining Alternatives to the Dystopian Future of Norrland", explains cultural amnesia as, Cultural amnesia refers to the diagnosis of a condition that occurs due to external or traumatic damage. This can be a cause for society to forget their roots, culture, and relationships with landscapes that have once been an example of society as a whole, but have now been forgotten and replaced with the ideal desire transferred from the original context. (Epp Jerlei, 2015: 4) Generally, cultural amnesia study is an interdisciplinary study involving two major areas of humanity and science, which evolved from historiography studies to memory studies over the last two decades (pp. 73431- p73432).

The study called cultural amnesia will be employed to read the pockets of memories that have been lost throughout the years in the Indian society as compared to the age of the British Raj in India. This loss is manifested through the major characters in *A Suitable Boy* and one most important character in *A Passage to India*; Dr. Aziz. The glory of the Indian empire before colonialism is always a romantic picture in the novels.

Both texts have never been analyzed from the stand point of cultural amnesia because the concept has not been widely explored in the literary world. When academicians look at cultural amnesia it is viewed from a cultural and psychological view point. Mohamed Ali and Ahmad discuss Sara Suleri's text *Meatless Days* vis-a-vis Andreas Huyssen's book *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Cultural of Amnesia* (1995). The title of the text itself shows that cultural amnesia is a problem connected to time. Those that suffer from this predicament are in a time warp in which their memories regarding cultural practices have gone to sleep or are in a slumber. Thus, it is important for us to cure this problem by triggering past memories of culture via literary texts and historical texts that are loaded with facts from the past. Fiction and literature alone cannot work without us employing sociological material to the

research of cultural amnesia. Therefore this research on *A Passage to India* and *A Suitable Boy* is an attempt to prod the forgotten memories of the past using an Orientalist text and a postcolonial text which Mohamed Ali, Halimah (2011), labels as an Orientalism From Within text. Such texts are works that reiterate the colonial agenda and adhere to an Orientalist framework.

The concept of cultural amnesia needs to be explored. According to Mohamed Ali and Ahmad (2018),

A cultural amnesia study conducted by Andreas Huyssen through his book *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Cultural of Amnesia* (1995) is well worth a look at the study as Huyssen focuses on the growing memory of human-induced cultural memory at the end of the 20th century, a transition century to the postmodern era. Despite his research focus on the German state, the problem of cultural memory highlighted by his views is relevant in the context of today's world culture. This book is divided into two main sections: part Time: Memory and Time and Memory: Part 2: Media and Culture (Media and Culture). This paper will only focus on the first part, 'Time and Memory' which shows the concept of cultural amnesia study clearly and appropriately for application with the selected text. Andreas Huyssen in his book's introduction section explains that culture in the context of modern day generation of the century is experiencing a crisis of a disease called amnesia. He said that, As we approach the end of the twentieth century and with it the end of the millennium, our gaze turns backwards ever more often in an attempt to take stock and to assess where we stand in the course of time. Simultaneously, however, there is a deepening sense of crisis often articulated in the reproach that our culture is terminally ill with amnesia. (Andreas Huyssen, 1995: 1) From the statement, Huyssen explains that as humans approached the end of the 20th century, their views often turned back as reassessing where they stood along the way. In view of this, there is a crisis that human culture is experiencing severe amnesia. This is because, the things that have passed in human history have formed a new or better situation compared to the earlier centuries. The study of cultural amnesia study Andreas Huyssen is a study that focuses on issues of time and memory and its relationship to cultural amnesia which prevails within the American and European societies. This study is a continuation of Freud's thought of memory and knowledge and its relation to forgetting in which the present context is diaspora and cultural amnesia. According to Huyssen, The turn toward memory and the past comes with a great paradox. Ever more frequently, critics accuse this very contemporary memory culture of amnesia—anesthesia or numbing. They chide its inability and unwillingness to remember, and they lament the loss of historical consciousness. (Andreas Huyssen, 2000: 27) (p. 73432).

Thus, the two texts will be viewed from a cultural diaspora perspective. The research will look at how Seth prods the memory of his Indian readers as well as his Western audience to trigger the forgotten past, the glory of the Indian kingdom as well as the glory of the British Raj in India. However, Seth does not evoke the camaraderie of the British and the Indian during the Raj era. There are glimpses in the novel of how India gained its independence and the rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims which worsened after the

partition. It is a text that in its entirety divorces itself from the British past in India except for a few references to British literature.

Fictions like historical texts help us to retrieve our forgotten memories. They assist us to cure our cultural amnesia. According to Lloyd, Annemaree (2007),

History is written by victors. It is the dominant paradigm and its culture and institutions that define what is to be remembered, and how it will be remembered (p. 54).

History is written from stories that are factual. Lloyd states that it is written by victors, which means it is written by those who have triumphed and survived the historical events with their memories intact. By referring to history as a dominant paradigm he indicates that it is a powerful tool that is employed by institutions and mankind to preserve memory. Those that are in charge of history are the ones that control human memories and cultural amnesia. The question that arises is, how much are we allowed to remember, and does fiction take up the historical project of memory and amnesia.

Can fiction writers play a role in triggering memory that is lost? Can they assist in retrieving the forgotten cultures of a race of people? How much do these writers have to rely on historical texts as well as oral literature – interviews with natives and observing the daily lives of the people of a country to regain memory and cure cultural amnesia? These questions will be answered via the analysis of the two novels. Lloyd, Annemaree (2007) argues,

Within collecting institutions, such as libraries, museums and archives, that seek to provide enduring access to the cultural memory, the concept of significance emphasizes importance and consequence to the community served by these institutions. Assigning significance creates an illusory “fiction” of collective understanding, so that an item of documentary heritage, once designated significant, is deemed worthy of remembering. The consequence of assigning significance is understood within the institutions as helping to shape the future consciousness, interpretations, and narratives of their communities. The act of assigning significance is a social action that is constituted through a symbolic need to establish or maintain a social thread or connection, to preserve a footprint that is deemed important, and to ensure the continuity of a community’s memory (p. 54).

Cultural memory that is collected through history vis-a-vis institutions such as libraries, museums and archives is labelled as illusory “fiction” of collective understanding. Thus, the material that is collected via history and the institutions that store it, though factual is labeled as fiction by Lloyd. Therefore, the significance of reality in relation to history and the institutions mentioned above is nullified or turned into something of an inconsequence. As a result the act of retrieving memory from these institutions is exposed as worthless.

This research will analyze the similarities and differences between an Anglo-Indian fiction and and English-Indian novel. Mohamed Ali (2011) finds

traces of Forster's *A Passage to India* in Seth's magnum opus *A Suitable Boy*. It will be pointed out in the analysis where Seth takes up the Orientalist project and produces Orientalism From Within and how memories of the past are resurrected by Seth in his novel by using Orientalist discourses such as Forster's novel as a model or referential point. Seth's project was to produce a historical fiction about politics and caste interweaved with subjects like politics, love and marriage. *A Suitable Boy* can be hailed as a modern day historical fiction – a historical novel about post-independence history with diminutive references to India. His writing is an act of retrieval. He retrieves India's past that is half-forgotten via an Orientalist framework that has been tried and tested by Anglo-Indian writers like Forster.

Analysis: *A Passage to India*

The Gymkhanna or The Club has always been associated with the British. It initiated the royal Indians and the elite Indians to Westernization. It also brought together both communities, the British ruling class and the Indian ruling class. In the excerpt below Mrs Moore and Miss Adela Quested who have recently arrived from England are introduced to the members of the Gymkhanna. The text states,

The Bridge Party was not a success-at least it was not what Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested were accustomed to consider a successful party. They arrived early, since it was given in their honour, but most of the Indian guests had arrived even earlier, and stood massed at the farther side of the tennis lawns, doing nothing. "It is only just five," said Mrs. Turton. "My husband will be up from his office in a moment and start the thing. I have no idea what we have to do. It's the first time we've ever given a party like this at the club. Mr. Heaslop, when I'm dead and gone-will you give parties like this? It is enough to make the old type of Burra Sahib tum in his grave." (Forster: pp. 36-37).

In this case Mrs. Heaslop is referring to the mingling between the Indians and the British at the club. The British especially the women have always treated the Indians with disdain and thought them to be inferior even when they are ruling class.

The image of the Indian to the English ruling class is well described via the character Ronny Moore. The text states that,

Ronny continued: " The educated Indians will be no good to us if there's a row, it's simply not worth while conciliating them, that's why they don't matter. Most of the people you see, are seditious at heart, and the rest'd run squealing. The cultivator-he's another story. The Pathan-he's a man if you like. But these people-don't imagine they're India." He pointed to the dusky line beyond the court. and here and there it flashed a pince-nez or shuffled a shoe, as if aware that he was despising it. European costume had lighted like a leprosy. Few had yielded entirely, but none were untouched. There was a silence when he had finished speaking, on both sides of the court ; at least more ladies joined the English

group, but their words seemed to die as soon as uttered. Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the kites passed the mass of a vulture, and with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not deeply coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they? Beyond which again ... (Forster, p. 37-38).

In the above excerpt it can be read that Ronnie is analyzing the Indian character. He talks about the educated Indian, the cultivator (farmer) and the Pathan. According to him these people do not believe that they are Indians. Their sense of belonging is not with India. This is due to the fact that the educated Indian has become a mimic man and is more British than the British himself. This can be seen years later in an Indian-English novel, *A Suitable Boy* through the character of Arun Mehra. This will be discussed later in this paper. The cultivator is not educated, his day to day life is most of the time in poverty. He does not have the time or leisure to think about national feelings. His life is under the control of the kings, landowners and most importantly the British since he makes the agrarian society tick. The Pathan is not a native of India. His roots are in Afghanistan. In Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* this character is portrayed as a British spy, and many discourses state that the Pathan was also an American spy. Thus, these are the people in India that the British used to rule over a nation that has more than 300 languages. Could the British colonizers ever understand a land where these many languages existed? A divided land and people that Queen Victoria after the Dahagi¹ tried to unite by creating the Durbar and educating the ruling class to educate their people and for self-rule. The educated Indian and their wives that are present at the club are mostly ruling class. The ruling class had their own kingdoms and princely states. India before British intervention was a land ruled by different Maharajas, Sultans, and Nizams, divided into little kingdoms and princely states. Thus, there was no unity and the belief that they belonged to India. The name India was given to the subcontinent by the British. It was derived from the name of the river Indus and also from Hinduism.

The text also iterates the superiority of the British over the Other. According to Forster,

"This isn't a purdah party," corrected Miss Quested. Oh, really," was the haughty rejoinder. "Do kindly tell us who these ladies are," asked Mrs. Moore. "You're superior to them; anyway. Don't forget that. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they're on an equality." Advancing, she shook hands with the group and said a few words of welcome in Urdu. She had learnt the lingo, but only to speak to her servants, so--she knew none of the politest forms and of the verbs only the imperative mood. As soon as her speech

¹Dahagi is The Indian Rebellion which occurred in 1857. It was a major uprising against the British East India Company, but was unsuccessful. This uprising gave the British Crown full control of India, and later Queen Victoria in 1877 created the Indian Durbar and started to train the Kings for self-rule. The Durbar was meant to unite India and its rulers. It was created to duplicate the idea of the United Kingdom that Britain had with Scotland and Ireland.

was over, she enquired of her companions, " Is that what you wanted ? " " Please tell these ladies that I wish we could speak their language, but we have only just come to their country." " Perhaps we speak yours a little," one of the ladies said (Forster: p. 40).

The text above describes the superiority of the English educated over the other Indians.

It is a statement of the white man's supremacy and superiority over the Other. The British supremacy forced the Indians to bring their women out of purdah. Thus, the party that is thrown in honour of Mrs Moore and Ms Adela Quested is not a purdah party. The Indian Ranas that most of the time are in purdah have to be at the party even when it is not a purdah party. To Ronnie Moore, all the other Indian women are inferior compared to British women. The British women even if their stature is of Mrs. Moor's are equal to the Rana's who are Indian royal ruling class. Thus, the superiority of the British is enforced through the British women as compared to the Indian Rana's.

The text is also exotic. It delivers exotica to its audience which in the early 19th century were mainly Western and white. It exoticizes the description of India and its history and religious artefacts. It even debases them. According to Forster,

Except for the Marabar Caves and they are twenty miles off the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. There are no bathing-steps on the river front, as the Ganges happens not to be holy here; indeed there is no river front, and bazaars shut out the wide and shifting panorama of the stream. The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist. They are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest. Chandrapore was never large or beautiful, but two hundred years ago it lay on the road between Upper India, then imperial, and the sea, and the fine houses date from that period. The zest for decoration stopped in the eighteenth century, nor was it ever democratic. There is no painting and scarcely any carving in the bazaars. The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life (Forster: pp. 5-6).

The river Ganges is holy to the Indians. According to the Hindus a bath in the Ganges can wash away sins. In order to avoid being disrespectful to the Hindus, Forster describes the part of the river that is not holy. However, since the river is associated with India's and Hinduism's purity the description above is insulting. The lodgings of the Indian's are also described as filthy and dirty. Forster also illustrates the glory of a past and gone empire. Imperial India's glory in Chandrapore stops during the 18th century and Forster criticizes it for being feudal and undemocratic. The Ganges and Chandrapore after British rule has deteriorated and become abased. What Forster describes is not the inferiority of

the Indian as much as the lack of order, justice and unskillful politics of the West, i.e. the British. India is left with the nostalgia of the past. The beauty of the Mughal and the Hindu Royal kingdoms is lost after colonialism. Forster may have thought that via his discourse he showed the inferiority of the East. However, cloze reading shows that Forster fell into a trap that he created for the Other. The carelessness of the British is shown via this text. The discourse echoes the glory of India's past and the power of the Mughal and Hindu kingdoms.

A Passage to India is about the black and white relationship as well. The relationship of the colonizer with the Other is described below, The hookah had been packed too tight, as was usual in his friend's house, and bubbled sulkily. He coaxed it. Yielding at last, the tobacco jetted up into his lungs and nostrils, driving out the smoke of burning cow dung that had filled them as he: rode through the bazaar. It was delicious. He lay in a trance, sensuous but healthy, through which the talk of the two others did not seem particularly sad—they were discussing as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman. Mahmoud Ali argued that it was not, Hamidullah disagreed, but with so many reservations that there was no friction between them. Delicious indeed to lie on the broad verandah with the moon rising in front and the servants preparing dinner behind, and no trouble happening. Well, look at my own experience this morning." "I only contend that it is possible in England," replied Hamidullah, who had been to that country long ago, before the big rush, and had received a cordial welcome at Cambridge. "It is impossible here Aziz! The red-nosed boy has again insulted me in Court. I do not blame him; he was told that he ought to insult me. Until lately he was quite a nice boy, but the others have got hold of him ... " Yes, they have no chance here, that is my point. They come out intending to be gentlemen, and are told it will not do. Look at Lesley, look at Blakiston, now it is your red-nosed boy, and Fielding will go next. Why, I remember when Turton came out first. It was in another part of the Province. You fellows will not believe me, but I have driven with Turton in his carriage-Turton! Oh yes, we were" once quite intimate. He has shown me his stamp collection" (pp. 8-9).

Aziz questions his friends about the Indian's possibility of being friends with the English.

His friends advice is that it is impossible. They argue that no matter how hard the British try to be neutral in the end they resort to racism. Hamidullah states that most probably a cordial relationship with the British is possible in Britain, because he was educated in Britain. According to Hamidullah the British cannot act like gentlemen in India due to peer pressure. Equality between the British and the Indian, Aziz's friends deduce is not possible.

The image of queen Victoria and the relationship of the Indian and the British in APTI:

"But take my case-the case of young Hugh Bannister. Here is the son of my dear, my dead friends, the Reverend and Mrs. Bannister, whose goodness to me in England I shall never forget or describe. They were father and mother to me, I talked to them as I do now. In the vacations their Rectory became my home. They entrusted all their children to me - I often carried little Hugh about - I took him

up to the Funeral of Queen Victoria, and I held him in my arms above the crowd." Queen Victoria was different," murmured Mahmoud Ali" (p. 10).

Mahmoud Ali's nostalgia about the British ends in the statement where he states that Queen Victoria was different. Her rule and philosophy was to unite the Indians and her empire. Although the Indians were not treated as if they were at par with the British she set out to educate the Indians and to free them from the shackles of slavery that the East India Company had put them in. Mahmoud Ali and his friends are an example of the products of Queen Victoria's project. The Westernized Oriental Gentlemen, who are still Indian at heart because they still practice the Indian lifestyle behind closed doors and eat Indian food. Their work ethics and professional manners have been honed through British education, but at heart and in their personal space they remain Indians.

Analysis: *A Suitable Boy*²

The nostalgia of the British past is depicted in many ways in *A Suitable Boy*. Seth uses one of the main characters, Arun Mehra, to remind us of the British and colonialism. Via this character we learn and understand the effects of colonialism on India and its people.

Arun Mehra's character depicts that although the British Raj came to an end in 1947, the core of its spirit is very much alive. He is a legacy that was left behind by the British colonizers. Arun Mehra is the Brown Sahib; the mimic man that the British created to rule over India and its people. The project was to produce natives that were 'English'. The mimic man is a character that is still projected in English-Indian fiction and vernacular Indian fiction.

The hybrid Indian that the British created is mocked by Seth via Arun Mehra's character. He is turned into a caricature that tries to present himself as a dignified personality due to his English education. He works for an English firm Bentsen and Pryce and he worships the English and their lifestyle. He is very westernized. He and his wife spend their evenings in English style clubs and while their evenings away dancing with his westoxicated friends.

Halimah Mohamed Ali (2011) explains that according to Dipankar Gupta (2000) Westoxicated personalities are elites that do not have any sense of citizenship and appreciation of universal values. Although these individuals have adopted Western clothes and manners, it is not necessary that their values are Western. Their clothes and manners emphasize their traditional snobbery (p. 39).

Via Arun Mehra, Seth portrays the narcissistic values that the British colonizers ingrained in the native intellectuals in India and worldwide. The fiction states that Arun Mehra is one of the "[F]ew Indians who had been

²Many of the ideas in this article and section have been discussed in Halimah Mohamed Ali. 2011. *Orientalism From Within: Arundhati Roy and Her Contemporaries*. Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia.

1 grudgingly allowed to enter the cool sanctum of the inner offices of Bentsen
 2 and Pryce (ASB: 457), very much like the Indians at the Gymkhanna in *A*
 3 *Passage to India* as discussed above. Arun Mehra is not the only employee that
 4 feels superior to his Indian counterparts. Seth states, “All of them were
 5 extraordinarily conscious of their exceptional position, and none more so than
 6 Arun Mehra. If ever there was a man enraptured by England and the English it
 7 was he. An here he was, hobnobbing with them in terms of tolerable
 8 familiarity” (p. 457). The text reminds us of the Brown Sahib that the Indians
 9 rejected and later forgot due to Independence.

10 Arun is an echo of Ronnie Moore, the character in *A Passage to India* that
 11 has been discussed above. Through Arun Mehra, Seth reiterates Ronnie
 12 Moore’s thoughts or rather Forster’s philosophy. According to the text, “The
 13 British new how to run things”, reflected Arun Mehra. They worked hard and
 14 played hard. They believed in command and so did he” (ASB: 457). This
 15 character is depicted to be very much influenced by British political ideas. It is
 16 stated that, “Arun used to listen to Churchill’s speeches on the radio during the
 17 War and murmur, as he had heard the English murmur, “Good old Winnie!”
 18 (ASB: p. 409). Through this character Seth is reminding us of what the British
 19 were and the mimic men that they created. He does not forget to communicate
 20 to us that “Churchill loathed Indians and made no secret of it, and spoke with
 21 contempt of Gandhi, a far greater man than he could ever aspire to be” (ASB:
 22 p. 409). Thus, Seth’s project is to remind us that mimicry did not work. The
 23 British used the Indians to rule over the Indians, but that project was
 24 implemented to benefit the colonizers. Therefore, he is criticizing the Indians
 25 that use the Orientalist framework to produce Orientalism from Within for
 26 Western consumption and benefit. From the three authors that Mohamed Ali
 27 (2011) discusses in her text Seth is discovered to be the least pandering and
 28 catering to the West. His fiction does not portray the Indian Other as inept or
 29 thrice marginalized. He produces an India that is balanced. Thus, his view of
 30 his country and people is an even-handed view.

31 According to Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, “India
 32 contains all that is disgusting and all that is noble” (Fischer, 1997: p. 176). *A*
 33 *Suitable Boy* presents to us the idea of nobility more than the suffering and
 34 disgust that is present in India. India as a setting is turned into something that is
 35 captivating and powerful by Seth. Via *A Suitable Boy*, Seth tries to cure our
 36 cultural amnesia of the royal past that India had. The culture that was almost
 37 destroyed by Indian Independence.

38 One of the images that Seth depicts in his fiction to remind us of India’s
 39 royal past is of a palace called Barsaat Mahal. According to the text it was
 40 constructed by Nawab Khuswaqt for his wife Fatima Jaan. The palace is said to
 41 be a “[M]iracle of marble filligral work” and built for the Nawab’s and his
 42 wife’s “life and pleasures” (ASB: 180-181). The palace stands “...at the
 43 Western end of the old town, on the Ganges itself... (ASB: p. 12). According to
 44 Mohamed Ali (2011),
 45

The castle is a symbol of Islamic-Moghul era in the history of India, before the British took over. It has been created with the picture of the Taj Mahal in mind. One of the seven wonders in the world, which is situated in Agra, India was built on a romantic and beautiful whim of a Moghul emperor. Shah Jehan created it in the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz. The legend of Taj Mahal has very cleverly been resurrected in the form of Barsaat Mahal. Thus, the fabulous and foreign India is presented to the world through something familiar and famous (p. 12).

Together with the Mughal past, Seth also mentions the river Ganges which runs supreme in the lives of Indians. Like Forster, Seth knows of its importance and romantic and exotic pull to the readers. Thus, Seth is curing India and the world of the cultural amnesia of a forgotten royal past and also of a forgotten religious past. Most people in the world including the Indians have forgotten what is sacred in India and what used to be important to the Indians. India's Independence was based more on socialist ideas than on a cultural past. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister was a socialist and so was Muhammad Ali Jinnah the President of the Muslim League that fought for the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim state. The partition riots further enhanced and strengthened socialism's stand on both countries, and people chose to forget the regal past of the countries that was connected to the castles and religion. Therefore, Seth, through his Magnum Opus tries his best to evoke the memories of both the modern day Indians and the West, of what India and Pakistan lost during their Independence from British colonialism.

Conclusion

This paper elucidates that there is a love and hate relationship between the British and the Indian which in its essence represents the relationship between the West and the East. It has analyzed and discussed both *A Passage to India* and *A Suitable Boy* successfully.

It has used the concept Cultural Amnesia that was brought into being by Clive James (2007). With this concept as a model and referential point, this essay has delved into the cultural aspects of India in relation to the West, i.e. the British as well as historical aspects that have been presented both by the Anglo-Indian writer and the Indian-English writer. The glorious Indian past is mentioned and the nostalgia that is present in both novels is analyzed too with the use of cultural amnesia as the connecting fibre that connects colonial India to the past and post-colonial India to the colonial past as well as the glories of the Hindu and Mughal empires. It delves into the cultural aspects of India that are presented in both novels.

This research has triggered the memories of the Indian past. Literature is a medium that can help cure the ill that is called cultural amnesia. Culture is a heritage of a nation. It has to be remembered and analyzed. Culture can educate us and help us in our day to day lives. In most parts of the world religion has become or is interpreted as culture too. Thus, this research on cultural amnesia

encompasses religious texts as well. Colonialism and our encounter with the West made us lose the religious aspects in our day to day culture as well. Therefore, it is important for us to use the concept of Cultural Amnesia in order to retrieve our past; i.e. culture, cultural space and religion as well as religiosity. The ills that are present in this world today especially those related to terrorism have sprouted due to our lack of knowledge about the past especially religious knowledge. Religious dogmas have been bandied by irresponsible individuals for their own ends. In order to retrieve a world order that is peaceful again we need to cure ourselves from cultural amnesia, educate ourselves and enlighten those around us on the cultural aspects of our lives especially those related to religious beliefs and rituals. We need to understand each other better and ourselves better in order to create a peaceful living environment for us to solve the major problems that the world is facing like the economic crisis and the environmental issues and distance ourselves from set Orientalist frameworks that are regurgitated by native intellectuals. The regurgitation develops neo-colonialism and imperialism and we remain slaves of the West. The two major problems mentioned cannot be solved unless we understand each other and create a peaceful living space globally and refrain from pandering and catering to the West especially for economic purposes to the extent that we “sell” our people and culture to them even if it is via fiction.

There is a quote by Sun Tzu which means, “Know thyself, know thy enemies, and in a thousand battles win a thousand victories”. In order to know ourselves we have to cure ourselves from cultural amnesia. Unless we know who we once were we will never be able to understand ourselves much less our opponents. To know our opponents does not mean we are gaining knowledge to destroy them. It is a tool that has to be used intelligently, because knowledge is power and unless it is properly used power can destroy. Thus, knowledge of ourselves and of the others should be used positively in order to cure ourselves and educate our opponents to create a better living space for ourselves globally; especially now in the 21st century when the world has become a borderless world. Fiction and history are some of the best tools that can be employed for this purpose.

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