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Resisting British Raj Through Short Fiction: A Study of Munshi Premchand's "Money for Deliverance"

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Abstract: For British writers, fiction served as a symbolic embodiment of colonialist-imperialist fantasies—an overt manifestation of colonial consciousness and a narration of potent yet unspoken realities. Modern Indian short fiction emerged as India's intellectual response to British colonialism and actively resisted the British Raj by challenging the imperial portrayal of India present in British short fiction. Existing literary research on the British depiction of India has either overlooked or briefly acknowledged the contribution of short stories to resisting British representations of India. Consequently, this present investigation gains significance, as Indian short stories offer a critical space for constructing counter-narratives to present an 'authentic' depiction of the nation. The selected short story for analysis is Munshi Premchand's "Money for Deliverance" (*Muktidhan*), which questions the British humanistic endeavor—both literary and cultural—in its failure to address the concept of imperialism and its perpetuation through specific imaginative portrayals of the colonized.

Keywords: British representation of India, British short stories, Indian short fiction, national consciousness, indigenous self-assertion, Premchand

The cardinal aspect of the English imaginative annexation of the native Indians was the "capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict" (Said, *Culture* 95). For British writers, fiction became a symbolic consummation of colonialist-imperialist fantasy, a direct illustration of colonial consciousness, and a narrative of potent but mute facts. The specific gaze in British short fiction can be accounted in the psychosociological contempt and the notion of cultural denigration, which is why the impression of British India –India as undeveloped and menial – was touted as the Raj's sterling defense for colonialism. Consequently, the colonized were portrayed as lacking intelligence, culture, religion, and, most importantly, history.

With every iota of Indian existence reeking of imperialism, even the form and content of the colonial Indian short fiction unwittingly partook the ideological preoccupations of imperialism visible in British short fiction. Modern Indian short fiction was India's intellectual reaction to British colonialism and fiction, not only with respect to the English language but also myriad other possibilities brought about by reflection and resistance. Imperialism is the eternal presence in the Indian short story fictional landscape even when the imperialist is absent. It introduced an entire assortment of new people who had hardly ever been a part of the literary realm. Thus, by altering the topography of representation, these short stories resisted colonial rule by redefining the indicative foundations of the Indian community.

In this paper, the question posed is how the content in modern Indian short fiction forged resistance to the British Raj by challenging the imperial imagination of India in British short fiction for the reason that such

representations were crucial in perpetuating colonial rule in India. It is an endeavor to accentuate the way Indian short fiction resisted British representations and how this resistance played a role in the formation of a new modern national consciousness. It tangentially extends a glance at broader concerns such as the character of Indo-British confrontation, resistance and indigenous self-assertion, colonialism and native culture, society, and self, modernity and tradition, and so on. These concerns make it imperative to question the British humanistic endeavor, literary and cultural, in its miscarriage of dealing with the concept of imperialism and its furtherance through the specific imaginative renderings of the colonized. The short story taken up for analysis is Munshi Premchand's "Money for Deliverance" (*Muktidhan*). In this story, a Hindu moneylender, Daudayal, comes under everlasting obligation to Muslim Rehman, who prefers to sell his cow to him than a butcher who had offered five rupees more.

Scholars such as Nandini Bhattacharya, Amal Chatterjee, and Javed Majeed have done previous studies in the field of British representations of India. However, in these studies, the period of consideration or the literary genre/mode is different. Most of the literary research on British portrayal of India has focused on the novels of canonical writers like Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, John Masters, Paul Scott, M.M. Kaye, and so on. Even Allen Greenberger largely restricts himself to the novels of the period 1880-1960 while analyzing the British image of India in imperialist fiction.

Bhupal Singh, while surveying Anglo-Indian fiction, also focuses on novels as his subject of study and discusses very few short stories sans the perspective of resistance by Indian short fiction writers to British fiction. The contemporary times have seen research being done on British representations in non-fictional writings such as newspapers, journals, scholarly articles, and so on, but not on short stories. Thus, while the foregoing studies undertook a fruitful discussion, they have either neglected or just made a passing reference to the manner in which short stories have contributed to the resistance of British representations of India. Short fiction has seldom been the point of departure for analyzing the politics of British fictional representations of India.

Therefore, the present study becomes relevant for the reason that Indian short stories furnish a critical space for the construction of counter-narratives to present the 'authentic' picture of the nation. These short stories can be deployed as historiographical documents, rendering insights into the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer by analyzing the imperial representations. Also, as a land of narratives, India has seen short stories exercising considerable influence on the masses in the form of anecdotes, folk tales, and others.

The paper is theoretically structured around the frame of reference of postcolonialism. Within this paradigm, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is of prime importance. It argues that the Orient was a construction and not a "natural" entity. Its affirmation of representations *as* representations is equally significant for the paper (Said 5). Moreover, Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* says:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the other permits) constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in signification of psychic and social relations. (75)

Therefore, the discussion of Premchand's short story achieves dynamism that opposes the British constructed static essentialism based on multifarious stereotypes.

Additionally, John Barrell, in *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism*, explicates the "this, that, the other" structure where "The Other" is further branched out into not-so-other "That" and an Absolute Other, both opposing the "This" (Self). Barrell asserts that this method was ubiquitous in colonialism and was manifested in the emphasis on binaries in the sustenance of the British Raj. In India, it can be extrapolated in the play-off of Hindus against Muslims, rural India against urban India, and so on. This is evident in the British short stories of Talbot Mundy and John Seymour Eyton, where the Hindus are characterized in a harsher light than the Muslims.

Finally, Gauri Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest*, discusses the British colonial strategy in which English Literature was employed to project an ideal portrait of British identity. She observes, "The English literary text, functioning as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state, becomes a mask for economic exploitation, successfully camouflaging the material and the cultural activities of the colonizer" (Viswanathan 20). The paper builds upon Viswanathan's basic reasoning of English Literature operating as a

discourse and further postulates that a de-idealized portrayal of the natives was also a part of the same project of idealizing the colonizers. The idealization exercise was a component of the self-justifying and self-convincing approach of the British. However, the paper departs from Viswanathan by asserting that the colonial strategy was not entirely successful. It examines Premchand's short story to expose the edging off of the British binaries that prolonged colonialism. It implies that there exists an opportunity for creative dismantling, suggesting that the rhetorical edifice is innately hollow and incapable on its own of resisting inquiry.

This creative dismantling is warranted for the reason that fictional maneuverings in British short fiction impart ready, undiscerning assent, endurance, and universality to the vulgar and precarious ideas by disseminating the imperial myths in an artistically consumable manner. To take an example, these short stories draw attention to the myth of the 'Indian Race' by stressing the existence of several Indian 'races' divided along religious/regional lines, such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Bengalis, and so on. To top it all, they attempt to evoke certain premeditated responses while discussing the characters belonging to a particular race. In John Seymour Eyton's "The Moods of Saleem," Saleem is a Muslim raider in the border areas of North-West India who assaults the *bunniah* moneylenders. However, the author sympathizes with the outlaw protagonist, who is romanticized for "his power of creating mystery…appearing as a knight-errant, the fanatic, the humorist, and the idealist by turns" (Eyton 51). Similarly, the Hindu nationalist Babu Gopi Nath in Eyton's "The Dancing Fakir" is shown in a harsher light when he is shown as "urging the crowd to loot the liquor shops…clarion call – 'Hotel' – 'Club' – 'Blood of the English dogs!'…Babu Gopi Nath had won them. The mob was beyond control" (Eyton 7). Not only the Hindu-Muslims, the representations of India reeked of ulterior colonial motives even in the descriptions of native women, rural India, nationalists, Westernized Indians (caricatured in Bengali *Babu*), 'loyal'/'good' Indians, and so on.

The resistance to the negative stereotyping of India in British colonial imagination occasioned the colonial Indian short fiction to become an intensely ideological site involving re-evaluations and realignments of colonial tropes, ideologies, and policies. In "The Aim of Literature," Premchand emphasizes the social purpose of a writer. He underlines the rendering of social reality in all writings while simultaneously unmasking society's decadence. This role of literature is encapsulated in his conception of "idealism-realism" or *Adarshonmukhi Yatharthavad* (Rai 35), which compels propagandist literature. Consequently, plots are to be based on real-life so that literature could be employed for expounding the social issues.

Aligned with a social purpose, Premchand countered the antagonistic British communal representations by presenting a sympathetic picture of rural India, where the Hindus and Muslims live in harmony and help each other during testing times. In "Money for Deliverance," a peasant Rehman sells his cow to moneylender Lala Daudayal despite incurring a loss "only to ensure she [cow] is not mistreated" (Premchand 775), and the story ends with Lala Daudayal waiving off Rehman's debt when his sugarcane is all burnt up. The story was published in March-April 1925, bearing direct relevance to the burning issue of Hindu-Muslim relations. The story belabors to depict that Muslims are an integral part of the Indian culture by emphasizing the common culture. Moreover, by sketching Daudayal as a considerate moneylender who forgoes his debt, Premchand is making his Hindu character relinquish so as to restore the confidence of and win over the minority community. Through this gesture, the writer points out that it is imperative for the Hindus to assuage the grief of the minorities. Such craft accentuates the sterility of communalism and enkindles nationalist fervor in the readers by challenging the British representation of a divided Indian society. Thus, one way of challenging the Indian representations in British short fiction is to directly question and tear them down as unfounded.

Another way the fictional and aesthetic strategies of Indian writers disempowered the imperial authority was by overturning the British representation of India in short fiction. In such a scenario, the native was shown as a symbol of British' modernity' rather than primitivism. To take a case in point, British writers often castigate the *bunniah* moneylenders, as seen in John Eyton's "The Moods of Saleem" for "acquir[ing] great wealth by selling grain at famine prices…lending out the capital so gained at exorbitant rates to the poor and needy" (Eyton 55). While rebuking the *bunniah* moneylenders and their unscrupulous practices, the colonizer misses the fact that this class was a product of misguided British modernity.

Colonial rule in India ushered in Western-style capitalism in agriculture that reestablished the nature of land relationships and resulted in the creation of a class of tenants whose livelihood was reliant on the landlords. It also enervated the village-protective mechanism by begetting a class of moneylenders whose interests lay outside the village. The moneylenders were a class that consolidated their social power because of the British economic policies of agricultural commercialization, deindustrialization of urban areas, inadequate investment

in agriculture, and lack of financial resources for the farmers. Premchand overturns this presentation in "Money for Deliverance," where he humanizes as well as contextualizes the moneylender Lala Daudayal within the larger rural society by moving away from the simplistic black-and-white portrayals in British short fiction. The morally conscientious Lala Daudayal says to Rehman, "Actually I am only paying back whatever I owed you. I am *your* debtor, you are not my debtor" (Premchand 786) while forgoing his debt obligations.

The omnipresent exploitation does not, however, indicate that all moral regimes are lost, and everything is lost to the severe forms of exploitation. The non-romantic depiction of agrarian society, oppressive moneylenders, and multiple layers of exploitation run the risk of oversimplification, where the narrative is reduced to an account of oppression and exploitation. Instead, the story is acutely rooted in the morality of peasant existence and outstepping the quotidian concerns. The story illustrates that peasants like Rehman are still guided by the permanent sense of moral economy. E.P. Thompson associated moral economy with customs when he asserted that the moral economy of the poor was "a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community," including the difference between legitimate and the illegitimate (188).

The spiritual elements of the moral economy of Rehman are the social code of conduct affiliated with tradition and customs. This moral economy or *Dharma* furnishes meaning to the peasant's existence. It is the peasantry that fundamentally cradles the Indian civilization in its positive value orientation and moral tenor. Therefore, the moral economy of Rehman that lies devastated in relation to the outside world is reinstated in the inner life. Laying bare the inner life, the author writes that "devotion to their mothers is a special characteristic of rural people" (Premchand 776). The upholding of the moral ethos, notwithstanding the hardships, notwithstanding being squeezed under Daudayal's debt obligations, entails Rehman deciding to take his mother on *Hajj*. The act of taking his mother on *Hajj* may appear specious in purpose but not in intent. This has been a part of Islam for centuries and is not meaningless unless analyzed from a strictly secular-scientific angle. It is deeply meaningful from the vantage point of a Muslim peasant, Rehman. By rendering a comprehensive picture of the rural society where the neighbors of Rehman financially help him in his thin times, come together to douse the fire in his sugarcane field, and several other instances draw the readers' attention to the ensemble of beliefs and relationships that form the moral economy of the peasantry.

In addition, Premchand also underscores the reciprocity that existed and still exists between the peasants and landlords/moneylenders. It is the cornerstone of the moral paradigm of the Indian rural realm. Premchand writes that "one craved the money while the other craved the cow" (Premchand 774) to punctuate the reciprocal existence in rural India. Additionally, Daudayal is considerate of Rehman's conditions and takes exception to the repayment when his sugarcane harvest catches fire. On his part, Rehman sells his cow to Daudayal despite making a loss in the transaction for the reason of his love for his cow. Rehman's subsistence needs form the basis for the reciprocal arrangement with the moneylender and was not formulated on idealistic principles but on the needs of the times. The economic rationale of Rehman is based on traditional rationality rather than the classical economics represented by Daudayal. The moneylender cannot fathom such morality when he says, "God! A person of his [Rehman] class has so much goodness and compassion!... And this poor man sold the cow to me despite suffering a loss only to ensure she's not mistreated. The poor also possess such wisdom" (Premchand 775). However, the colonial intervention altered the situation drastically.

There is a substantial impetus on the separateness of the peasant values (traditional in orientation) in the colonial context in the story, and the steadfastness of such values challenges the British representation of India, where the peasants were described as weak and without agency. Also, Indian tradition– couched in peasantry moral ethos– is influenced by the larger Hindu religio-philosophical system propounded in the *Bhagvad Gita*, which insists that one should practice one's *Dharma* regardless of the existence of reciprocity or the guarantee of return. Thus, an entire philosophy of life and a distinct cultural universe is foregrounded in the story that contests the monolithic representations of India. Moreover, the overarching interconnectedness between the story and Indian philosophical tradition foregrounds the idea of longer civilizational continuity that was/*is* India and dismantles the fossilized imperial representation of India in British short fiction. Concomitantly, it endows the natives with a sense of history as well as a self-identity of belonging to a specific territory and, thus, supplying cultural ammunition to fight colonial rule.

The cultural ammunition of fictionally 'manufacturing' the nation coincided and further augmented the destabilization of the British representations of India and became one of the fronts of the national struggle against the British Raj. Short stories like "Money for Deliverance" play a crucial role in bringing up a new

cultural consensus by ushering in a nation into being through textuality and language, a consensus shaped by dialogue, confrontation, and debate. The friction between the Indian and English sensibilities opened up the ideological liminal space where the Indian colonial concerns could be deliberated upon and worked out symbolically. This symbolic resolution is portrayed in the confrontation of tradition and modernity. In as much as the newly formulating Indian collectivity was both an expression and a vehicle of civilizational burden, the short stories relayed the self-representations as well as the self-apprehensions of the Indian civilizational burden in its fight against the British fictional account of India. This was symptomatic of the contemporary encounter with modernization, both social and literary. Thus, Indian short fiction romanticized traditional Indian cultures and critiqued traditionalism while bargaining with modernity in India in British short fiction.

This paper has attempted to argue that Premchand's "Money for Deliverance" and the larger class of colonial Indian short fiction personified a new kind of modern national consciousness that articulated an awareness about the dawning Indian collectivity, which challenged the British representations of India. The Indian short fiction urges that the representation of the village and peasant life be located within the Gandhian hegemony on Indian nationalism that prompted the rural life to be seen in a refreshingly new consciousness. The upshot of this consciousness was that the peasants were to be regarded as agents, as conscious and active beings, and villages as the archetypes of the idea of India. The peasantry– abused and manipulated to the extreme– stood steadfast against the iniquity of the world. It called attention to the hidden perils of modernity espoused in British fiction by pressing home the Indian tradition in pursuit of a new Andersonian 'imagined community.'

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