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DUALITY OF CHARACTER  
IN ORWELL'S WORKS WRITTEN ON THE EAST

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**How can tongues fulfil what hearts fail to accomplish.**

**Anonymous**

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**ABSTRACT**  
**DUALITY OF CHARACTER IN ORWELL'S**  
**WORKS WRITTEN ON THE EAST**  
**BY**  
**GHOLAMREZA IJAD**

Orwell, as an Anglo-indian writer, has been greatly affected by his experiences in the East. And this effect is evident all through his works especially those written on the East. One distinct feature of these works is the apparent self-dividedness of their characters. Orwell's heroes are self-divided in their sympathy for the East and its people, and their devotion to the Empire. On the one hand, they defy Empire's tyranny in the East, and on the other, they think of the exploitation of the East as necessary to the Empire's greatness. This study has tried to show that Orwell himself possessed this duality of feeling for the East and the Empire, and extended this duality of character to the heroes of his works.

This study traces the notion of duality of character in Orwell's novel *Burmese Days* and a few of his shorter works. Since

Orwell's background and experiences have proved vital in presenting a better analysis of his works, one chapter is devoted to the author's background and different stages in life. The main chapter of this study analyses Orwell's novel *Burmese Days* while a third chapter surveys a few of his short stories namely "Shooting an Elephant", "A Hanging" and "Marrakech". These chapters search for traces of Orwell's background and lifetime experiences in the East in his works, and the extent to which he has consciously or unconsciously tried to present himself through the characters created in these works. This study investigates the above works to prove that duality of character is a major feature of Orwell's own character which has been extended into his works through his heroes.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Colonial Literature, Its Background and Development Through the History of Literature**

The history of colonial literature dates back as early as the beginning of colonialism itself. It would be better to begin with a definition of colonialism so as to shed more light on the significance it has and its relationship with the subject of this study. Encarta Encyclopedia gives a definition of colonies and colonialism as:

Territory, inhabited or not, acquired by conquest or settlement by a people or government previously alien to that territory; and, imposed foreign rule upon such a territory. A colonial relationship develops when one people or government extends its sovereignty and imposes political control over an alien people or territory.

Colonialism has existed ever since the civilizations were formed. As history approves the Phoenicians were one of the first civilizations to establish colonies along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea as early as 1100 BC. Other ancient civilizations like many of the Greek city-states, the Romans and the Persians were among those states and empires which expanded overseas, impelled by the need for arable land and the desire to increase commerce.

Modern European colonialism spans over a long period beginning in the fifteenth century and running through the mid-twentieth century. This period itself can be divided into two overlapping phases: the first from 1415 to about 1800, the second from about 1800 to World War II. In the first phase European colonialism expanded over the East Indies and the Americas where Spain and Britain were the more prominent of the colonising states. Both countries, however, lost most of their colonies by the early 1800s. In this period the novel form had already started its rise becoming an independent literary genre. Therefore, along with a series of already existing essays, travelogues and reports about the colonies, many novels were also written which reflected the existing relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. A good example of this is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, in which he creates a subject/servant



relationship between *Man Friday* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Such direct effect of colonialism on the kind of literature which it produces, that is colonial literature, is due to the superiority that colonialism offered the European coloniser; moreover, with the eventual expansion of British dominion in the East English language was turned into a weapon to exercise English dominance. Firdous Azim emphasizes the above point in *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*: “English, both for the colonisers and the colonised, was designed to give an impression of English cultural superiority” (14).

In the second European colonial phase Britain led the other European countries and stretched its territorial expansion over Asia, Africa and the Pacific region. This era itself could be divided into two periods: the first from early nineteenth century up to the early 1880s, and the second from 1880s up to the end of the World War II.

In the first period European and especially English expansion of territory in the East is at its peak and the eastern countries are simply regarded as the colonies and their people as natives. Benjamin Disraeli's *Tancred* is a good example of the novel of this age in which by regarding the East as “a career,” he introduces the East as a colonial resource for the West. E.S. Shaffer's *Kubla Khan* and *The Fall of Jerusalem*, Gustave

Flaubert's *Salammbô* and Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* are other examples of the novels written in this period; in all of this literature the colonialistic attitude claiming the western superiority over the East is evident.

The second period of the above era, however, is the time in which the bells began to toll for the calm colonial rule over the East. The industrial revolution followed by the new social and political trends such as Marxism brought all nations including the colonies into an age of adulthood. It was no longer an easy job for the European coloniser to keep the colonies calm and control its assets. In this period Britain had the biggest share of the colonies in the East as the Indian subcontinent; therefore, it was inevitable for some British authors to choose the Subcontinent as their subject of fiction. So as we move into the late nineteenth century and the Early twentieth century, we come to a group of English novelists who have either had colonial background in the Subcontinent or had visited the Subcontinent. These novelists, namely, Rudyard Kipling, Edward Morgan Forster, and George Orwell have all used the Indian subcontinent as the subject of one or more of their novels. These novelists are thus regarded as the Anglo-Indian writers, and the collection of their works fall into a smaller category of colonial literature: the Anglo-Indian

literature, which from here on will be the category of literature under discussion.

The social and political movements of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century made the intellectuals of this area especially the Anglo-Indian novelists have second thoughts about the whole doctrine of colonialism in the East, thus, making them more lenient in their approach towards the colonised nations. Kipling is an example of such authors who has used his experiences on the subject in his writings. Authors like Kipling loved the East, yet, seemed to have a loyalty to their country and the colonial cause, and proud of being a coloniser in the Subcontinent. In "The Road" from *Rydyard Kipling Verse* he emphasizes the need for the presence of the white man in the colonies and sees the world as a place where there should be the ruler and the ruled:

Now, this is the road that the White Men tread  
When they go to clean a land -  
Iron under foot and the vine over head  
And the deep on their hand. (1-4)

With the outbreak of the First World War a trend of change began to reshuffle the political pattern of the world. The war itself had been the cause of many technological improvements. Social sciences were turned upside down by the

new Freudian theories, which caused further concentrated reflections on man, his personality, and his innerself. The Marxist movement too had already brought new political awareness to the nations of the world. Thus the Victorian and Georgian mentality and attitude towards the world had to make room for the new social and political trends. Under the new conditions a new generation of novelists found their way into the world of literature. These novelists could not leave the issue of European colonialism unquestioned. Therefore, the more recent Anglo-Indian authors like Orwell found it hard to come to terms with the traditional imperialistic way of life.

After a review of the trends of change in the eras leading to the early twentieth century, it seems clear how literature especially colonial literature has been affected by these changes; and since this study is limited to the study of Orwell's works as an Anglo-Indian author, it would only seem relevant to study these works in the light of the political and social changes of these periods.

## **1.2. The Statement of the Problem**

As it has already been mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the East-West relations grew in line with the growth of the European colonial policies. The general approach toward

the East was that of western authority over eastern submission. Yet with the recent changes in the political pattern of Europe between the two Wars, authors assumed their own personal approaches towards the issue and depending on their kind of experience in the East, their personalities and their social awareness, they produced works which depicted their diverse feelings about the coloniser and the colonised. David Seed in his essay "Disorientation and Commitment in the Fiction of Empire: Kipling and Orwell," also refers to the same point regarding the Anglo-Indian novelists:

As Shamsul Islam has pointed out, imperialism essentially denotes a relationship between a ruling elite and a larger group, those ruled<sup>1</sup>. In the novelists of Empire this relationship produces an acute tension which in turn carries a whole range of consequences for their fiction. These novelists were far too aware to accept the bland official line on Empire. Their humaneness, political scruple and sense of place strains against their awareness that they are writing as members of a ruling elite and complicates their perspective on their subject. (269)

Orwell, as the author whose colonial works are covered by this study, is perhaps the best example of the kind of novelists

Seed refers to. By reviewing Orwell's works on the East, one will sense a strange harshness and violence dominating the atmosphere and the personality of the characters. As an Anglo-Indian author Orwell could not escape being a novelist of Empire but what separated him from other novelists was a kind of ambivalent attitude towards the colonies which frequented almost all of his novels, short stories and essays. In fact in all of his works done on the East his heroes seem to have a duality of character, a natural resentment towards the colonised and a conscious rejection of the Empire.

Orwell's works depicting duality of character include his novel *Burmese Days*, and many of his short stories on the East. In *Burmese Days*, for example, Orwell recreates the Burma of the 1920s at the time when the Empire is at pains to keep its colonies in tact. Flory, the novel's hero, is a pseudo-intellectual who as well as playing the role of a sahib, is conscious of the Empire's wrongness and finds himself unable to endure the pukka sahib figure he is expected to have. Flory's reaction to the Empire is directed through a similar hatred of the other sahib figures at the Club. But being a white man and a sahib automatically sets him apart from the native society, a distance he is never able to cover. Therefore, Orwell leaves us with a

character who is in a state of love and hate having an ambivalent attitude towards both the oppressor and the oppressed.

The same problem exists within Orwell's shorter works. In "Shooting an Elephant" which also has its setting in Burma, Orwell introduces the character of a sub-divisional police officer who is forced to kill an elephant against his will. In "Shooting" one can sense the wavering atmosphere of hatred both against the Empire and the natives. Nowhere is Orwell more outspoken about this ambivalence than in "Shooting":

With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. (266)

Orwell seems to express the same kind of duality in other of his short stories. In "A Hanging" for example his hero who is a magistrate expresses his disgust for having to kill a perfectly healthy man but at the same time he keeps his ideas to himself and after the hanging drinks to a job well-done instead. In "Marrakech" too Orwell offers a vivid account of the plights of the natives in a colonised society. The narrator seems concerned about the people he is describing but he is equally concerned