

Exoticism in L. H. Myers' *THE NEAR AND THE FAR*

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The Anglo-Indian Literature is no less interesting today than that it was during the British Raj in India. The Anglo-Indian Fiction, in the words of Bhupal Singh; an Indian scholar, 'describes the life of English men in India'.¹ It covers the revelation of writers on discern India. There is an extensive as well intensive narration and observation on India in their fiction opus. Such composition is pertinent to contemplate over the social milieu and cross-cultural exchange of British-India during 'Sahibs' Ruling in the Post-colonial period. Their calligraphy is not mere recording of the British-Indian affiliation. However, it is an augment of the writers' idiosyncratic perspective on British life in India with a deliberation. Apart from such eking out there is outlandish prospect on India in Myers' *THE NEAR AND THE FAR* (1929).

L.H. Myers' (1881-1944) who is a contemporary of Edward Thompson and E.M. Forster, an Anglo-Indian novelists. In the novel, he has used India of 16th Century as a background for fiction of every sort to view on Indians. In his 'Introduction' to **The Root and The Flower** (1984) Penelope Fitzgerald has pointed out "Myers wants us to look at his world of appearances and beyond it. Appearances cannot be dismissed as and illusion, for no illusion can be created except by reason."² And here an attention goes on his word of 'Appearance'. It is to be noted here that Myers is desperate in appellation of experiences and sentiments from that of Anglo-Indian novelists such as John Masters and Paul Scott. He is exterior to the tradition of Anglo-Indian Literature as neither his visitation India not doled out the predilections of those novelists. Besides his India is a unique formation of artistry which is ill-matched with other Anglo-Indian novelists' depiction especially the great King Akbar's reign. The present novel which has come out of such context, an any Indian may ask what kind of account 'authenticity' is there in presentation on India? And here Myers is fully weird from other Anglo-Indian novelists as well. Inna Walter very clearly points out the difference between Myers and other Anglo-Indian writers:

...the difference between Myers and other major fiction writers who chose India for their canvas must be made clear. while several British and Indian novelists chose to write about India before and after Independence to portray Indian life delineating a picture that was a romantic or historical, critical or merely fictional, Myers clearly states in his Preface to the Indian novels that his intention is not to portray the Indian mode of life either historically or romantically, but to make use of the novelist's prerogative to make what he liked

*of certain geographical and historical material and to censure the life and manners of his own age though the fictional device chosen.*³

The present paper further attempts to denote Myers is not fair towards both in portrayal Indians and British in idealistic manner. His 'myriad' exoticism appears in the novel. Its mark is also to focus on Indians are Orientals and British are Occidentals and added to denote 'Occidental' is much nobler. The term in this context of Edward Said's 'Occidental' is right one.⁴

THE NEAR AND THE FAR, the first tetra logy in **The Root and the Flower**, deals with Rajah Amar, the Raja of Vidyapur, who believes in Buddhism; marries Helen, a girl in Caucasus religion. Jali is their son. They have invited by the Emperor Akbar to attend imperial Durbar.

Myers' encounters the Western with the Eastern to understand the meaning of life. And for it he shows Rajah Amar of Vidyapur marries Helen, a Caucasus girl of eighteen years and gives her name Sita. It sees in:

There it was that the Rajah had met and married her. (Helen with an oriental grace and the daughter of a Georgian prince, who exiled, had found a refuge in Persia) It had been the romance of his life and the wonder of it flashed over him now...now in these moments when by some vagary of imagination he found himself gazing at her detachedly with the eyes of a stranger. 5

Myers tries to show Rajah's inability to understand her being as an oriental. Though he is very close to her, he looks as if she is foreigner yet.

Rajah Amar and Sita are living together as husband and wife even though they are far away from each other spiritually and religiously. Myers' revelation is to insinuate the east and west can not really encounter. And this perspective reflects in the following lines:

Ten years her senior, he felt himself old enough to be her father. If she had the gift of innocence, he had a faculty for experience of their ancestors already resting somewhat heavily upon them. He could not reproach her, if after all these years, in spite of their love, they were still, spiritually, wide apart. In his religion, as he well knew, he stood aloof, not only from her but from nearly all his contemporaries. 6

Here calls to mind the lines from Rudyard Kipling's **The White Man's Burden**:

*Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years,
Cold-edged with dear-brought wisdom,
The judgment of your peer.*⁷

Myers', then, has pointed out that after many years Rajah rediscovered the doctrine of Buddha in its authentic purity but Sita, who had been christened as Helen; has not the penetration of Eastern religion. It reveals in: Sita had never been able to understand it (Buddha and its doctrine). 4 Myers further depicts Gokal who is a pundit lives in openly in concubine with Gunevati, the yogini of the Vamchari which is against the principles of pundit. It notices in: *This big, sedentary pundit had a talent for humorously exploiting his own foibles,...* .8

There is a view of novelists that the ruler, Akbar, is not performing his duty as father. It reflects through : 'Akbar was a bungler; he had never learnt how to deal with his children'9 Myers' exoticism finds further in Akbar's preoccupation with religion. It mirrors in:

Akbar had been a good Moslem, but his friends had seen him first questioning, then rejecting, and finally oppressing the faith... At Fatehpur... Sikri a special Hall had been built for religious debate, and here he collect ... every variety of fantastic belief. and then he would make them talk. by Allah! How they talked! And what had come of it all ? Nothing!... Akbar had recently thrust forth upon the world... a new religion, forsooth... the Din llahi, a miscreant that would be negligible were it not so powerfully fathered. 9

Myers accessorially concerns with Hindu people's religious orgy. It bares in:

For years he (Akbar) had known that in hundreds of temples and secret meeting places religious orgies were being held with a frequent accompanied of human sacrifices... In every village, in every city, in the palace itself he could sniff the sickly taint. Saktism! Thuggee! The worship of the Female Principle Kali, the Goddess of Birth and Death! Her power, against which Akabar warred,... 10

Muslim religion is additionally pointed out as a folly. In the discussion between Amar and Gokal, Gokal ponders: 'The Din llhai will fail in the end because it is a folly'.14

Myers' alien view towards Indians divulges through the conversation among Gokal, Amar and Sita. Gokal tells Amar trusts in Hindu religion-the Upnishad and its ideals. It appears through Sita's restoration against it:

'You can read many of my thoughts'. 'Don't you then also know that I shall never be able to accept Amar's view of life ?' 'I, myself, do not accept it',... 11

Myers' deals supplemtrily with Sita's living in Akabar's India which brings her back to the past and can do duck. It exposes Sita's outlandish in those days. It exhibits:

The country through which they were now passing did actually remind her of

the Caucasus. Its torrents and flowery meadows, its heavy efforts and cool, dewy nights-these bought back not only the memories, but the actual feelings that had been hers in early days. She thought of her parents and their friends, of all the old life that wars and disasters had broken up. It seemed very far away now; and yet that dimness and distances were still home. Memory revived made the civilization into which she had been transplanted seem outlandish again. 12

There finds the moral without sense in behaviour of Sita. Myers' has not spared to reveal even the nature of Sita [Helen] who had grown up in Western Culture. The protagonist Amar abominates her which denudes in the following words:

She was quite without character, intelligence, taste or moral sense. 'then how lovely she must be ! Thought Sita, and she sighed, for she was not unlike other women in her inability to decide whether the value which men set on mere beauty was a matter for laughter or tears. 13

Myers' has made Indian to confess his tawdriness to Sita. It comes to know from the duologue between Sita and Hari:

'You are right, no doubt', said he at last 'and I am wrong. But I was born wrong'. 'I'm sorry you are depressed, 'she returned, in her rather drawling, rather expressionless voice. 'You feel, 'suppose, that there is no mystery left in anything, that all feeling is stale, that life is an open book which you have read over and over again. And you think that your mood is permanent. Suffering always has as Feizi says, the nature of infinity'.14

Myers' has deliberately differentiates his religion from Indian and attempted to put its impressiveness. It catches out in Hari and Sita's conversation where Hari affirms:

'Your business now, surely, is to look, not for happiness, but for something deeper out of which happiness will spring'. Hari gave a shrug. 'Christianity', suppose !'. Looking into the distance Sita smiled to herself. 'You might do worse'. 'I am very well aware that I could not possibly do better'. Returned Hari. 'Your Christianity, at any rate, is charming'.15

Myers' has more attempted to expose Hari is menial and off beat to love Sita which brings to light in the below lines:

'You have grown so accustomed to my adoration', he said, 'don't you think you may miss it a little when we part ?' Her answer was made quite lightly. 'my dear Hari, I shall miss you very much,. 'I was not suggesting that. i said you would miss being made love to'. 'now why' 'She questioned in a voice completely changed, 'why do you go out of your way...?' 'he shrugged. 'Lets us look the truth in the face. i have

been making love to you'. 'No, no!' she cried. they were standing beside the little bridge when this was said, for their hour had just run out. A few deep moments of indecision passed over them. They were looking at one another intently. And then Sita turned and took the path up to her house.16

Indians prefer to live in illusive world and it is for them truth in life. For example, it is espies from the parley on actuality between Mabun Das, the admirer of Prince Salim and Hari Khan:

'What do you mean by reality, my dear Mabun ?' oh, I am no philosopher. By reality I mean Maya – the phenomenal world, illusion, if you please to call it so. but for us illusion alone exists ;we live in it; it is our life; let us accept it ?17

Myers had never visited India and he was at no time involved with the Indian political scene. We can say that in his exoticism satire is directed against both the British and India.

Works Cited

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- 4 Edward Said, 'Introduction' **Orientalism** [Penguin Books, 1995]
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- 7 Lines from 'The White Man's Burden', written in 1899 to celebrate the victory of the United States against Spain, which had resulted in the acquisition of Cuba and the Philipine Islands, appealed the United States to play its part in the imperialist task, quoted from, Shamsul Islam, 'Chronicles of the Raj: A Study of Literary Reaction to the Imperial Idea Towards the End of the Raj'. [London:macmillan,1979], P.6.
- 8 L.H. Myers, **The Root and the Flower**,[London: Secker and Warburg,Ltd.,1984],P.34
- 9 Ibid. P.43
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- 12 Ibid. P.100
- 13 Ibid.P.103
- 14 Ibid. PP.110-111
- 15 Ibid. P.113

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17 Ibid. P.178