



RESEARCH PAPER

A Postcolonial Reading of Anguish of Separation: Orientalist Discourse and the Self/Other Binary in the Light of Edward Said

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DOI

[http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2022\(6-1\)17](http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2022(6-1)17)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

October 31, 2021

Accepted:

February 28 , 2022

Online:

March 01, 2022

Keywords:

Post colonialism and Orientalism,
Self/Other Binary and Edward Said,
Identity Formation and Cultural Representation,
Qualitative Analysis,
Anguish of Separation

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This paper explores postcolonial interpretations of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, focusing on Gobind Malhi's *Anguish of Separation*, which foregrounds Orientalist discourse and the construction of the Self/Other binary. The novel defines cultural division, ideological power structures, and identity formation in a postcolonial context shaped by colonial history. A descriptive approach was used to analyze textual meanings and themes from a close reading of the novel. The study's findings revealed that novels portray disputed identities and spaces, where the Self is well-defined in conflict with the other. Evident in Orientalist discourse was a sign of cultural difference and marginalized identities, reinforcing hierarchies. The Self/Other binary play vital role for contribution to psychological pressure, disaffection and split objectivities among characters. This study concludes with *Anguish of Separation*, which critically reflects on the lingering impact of postcolonial identity formation, demonstrating how Orientalist frameworks continue to shape awareness of selfhood and cultural representation in literature.

Introduction

Post-colonialism is an intellectual discourse that grapples with the questions of identity, and cultural heritage resulting from colonial rule. Also, it analyzes its colonial, cultural and economic legacies. Post-colonialism does not include the literature that either represents the American or the British literature (AYAR & TAŞTEKIN, 2022). The 19th century was marked by the difference between the West and the rest. This field of inquiry offers a wide range of colonized perspectives, criticizing colonial narratives and portraying the indigenous voices and experiences (Young, 2012). This theory looks at the photograph from the other side and that other side is non-western or colonized people. It is a theory that claims that all people have right to the earth, its material things and their cultural wellbeing (Hsieh, 1997). As the literature surveys the aftermath of colonial rule, prioritizes themes such as identity crises, displacement, trauma, and hybridity. Partition

literature, written by survivors and later generations, serves as a strong channel to reflect on this historical damage and its lingering effects. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (1978) is significant as it argues about the 'Orient' as the Western construction used as a tool to expand colonial rule (Loomba, 2002). His theory showcases how the colonial discourse represented non-western societies as backward and therefore the backward and the poor need Western intervention for the uplift of the backward. This perspective is of great significance in the sense as the partition was a colonial legacy and the way the British Empire represented South Asia fostered a sense of division along religious and ethnic lines. The way the identities of the Muslims and the Hindus were represented during the colonial rule and how this pre-existing division was reinforced through colonial policies. The overall British rule be it administration, census or legal system it fostered a sense of 'us' and 'them' among the locals which led to the great upheaval of partition. Said's theory helps deconstruct the representations-visual or textual questioning the power dynamics embedded in the texts and images (Jefferess, 2008). Gobind Malhi's *Anguish of Separation* is not the express commentary of the colonial rule but it deals with the aftermath of the colonial rule and its impact during and after the partition in the form of violence, displacement and killing. Said's framework helps analyze and examine how identity engineering and communal riots intensity can contribute to partition trauma (Ashcroft, 2001). As the literature surveys the aftermath of colonial rule, prioritizes themes such as identity crises, displacement, trauma, and hybridity. One of the most horrific impacts of colonialism in South Asia was the Partition of Pakistan-India in 1947, which led to mass violence, forced migrations, and deep-seated cultural bursts (Kennedy, 1996).

Literature Review

Concepts in Postcolonial and Partition

Orientalism by Edward Said examines how colonial discourse constructed South Asian identities and construction of the 'East' as the 'Other'. This is pivotal in deciphering how ideological orientation contributed to the binary division leading to the Partition of India (Jejisher Gill, 2014). Similarly, the concept of hybridity by Homi Bhabha contributed to unpack identities of all those individuals who were caught in-between especially vis-à-vis survivors of the partition and their descendants grappling with a sense of fragmented sense of belonging. On the other hand, Spivak's subaltern studies offers insights into the marginalized and unheard voices, especially women, refugees and the poor (Govindani & Menon, 2026). This study integrates these postcolonial frameworks to examine the work that represents the subaltern and marginalized voices of the Sindhi Hindu experience serving and contributing to the subaltern historiography of the displaced individuals (Sequeira, 2016). Gobind Malhi's *Anguish of Separation* provides a criticism to the political decision resulting in suffering and loss of millions. Thus it requires a detailed understanding vis-à-vis postcolonial theory, trauma studies and other perspectives such as subaltern voice to unfold identity, memory and historical representation (Stewart, 2020). The novel can

be studied using the postcolonial theories of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Gayatri Spivak's subaltern studies and Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma to critically analyze partition representation and to explore the themes of identity, memory as a tool for preserving it and the search for belonging among those who migrated (Kolli & Charyulu, 2021). Each of these lenses offers a perspective to understand how and in what ways colonial discourse constructed identity, traumatic events having influence on collective consciousness and marginalized voices of the poor and women struggle to be heard in dominant narrative voices (Singh, 2013). Edward Said's *Orientalism* constructs the east as inferior, culturally backward and thus it label them as 'other' about the discursive strategies that contribute to shaping identities, cultural hierarchies and colonial power relations (Datta, 2010).

Material and Methods

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research approach to perform a postcolonial reading of Gobind Malhi's *Anguish of Separation*, concentrating on Orientalist discourse and the formation of the Self/Other dichotomy using Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism*. Data were collected using Said's (1978) model, as well as from books, Google Scholar, and library resources. The study examined these data within colonial and postcolonial contexts, with particular attention to the influence of language on identity, internal conflict, and cultural dynamics in the narrative. The review analyzed narrative voice, symbolism, power relations, and cultural distinctions. The findings highlight how individuals construct self-identity in relation to others, exposing patterns of inequality and marginalization.

Results and Discussion

The Ashram incident brings to light collective suffering of the village. When the social order is broken down, the powerful family of Syed's feels troubled at the '*unfortunate incident*' of Ebrahim who was sent home and Saanwal was made to filter bhang. Thus they were physically separated. The Syed's try to cover the offence to demonstrate a shared anxiety. The separation is symbolic to the impending national separation and ensuing psychological pain of it.

'Ebrahim had never seen both the Syed brothers, chiefs of the village, so tense...The unity between the Syed brothers was well known (Malhi, 1953/2014, p. 15).

The ideology of separation physical and psychological colonizes the mind long before it results in the land division.

'Doesn't Religion and God prescribe the message of brotherhood, love and unity amongst humans? Why are human beings divided in the name of religion? Why are innocent minds being poisoned? (Malhi, 1953/2014, p. 2). Similarly, the slogans of "HINDU RELIGION IN DANGER, HINDU WARRIORS BE ALERT" (Malhi,

1953/2014, p. 1) on a poster is to incite fear and division causing psychological discomfort.

Postcolonial Perspective

The results show that identity is a social relation and autonomous. A novel story defines self and duality in Edward Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism to build identity.

Table 1
Postcolonial Interpretation and Description

S. No.	Finding	Description	Postcolonial Interpretation
1	Identity as relational	Identity develops through the process of comparing the self to the other.	Edward Said's Orientalism argues that identity is made difference
2	Self/Other binary	The Self defined an opposition symbol towards the Other	Represent unequal cultural values and reinforce ideological limitations
3	Cultural hierarchy	Different identities portrayed from the familiar, while others.	colonial discourse rooted in implicit hierarchy
4	Subtle Orientalist discourse	Indirectly, Colonial philosophy impact on awareness and interactions	Orientalism Shows imagination of postcolonial cultural
5	Fragmented identity	Unstable and shifting identities struggle	Postcolonial Indicates historical displacement
6	Psychological alienation	feel and emotion divided in belonging	Reveals a condition of postcolonial identity
7	Cultural negotiation	Identity in step and redefined	Bhabha demonstrates postcolonial context through hybridity and fluidity
8	Persistence of colonial influence	Continues Colonial ideology independence	ideological control does not end through decolonization
9	Memory-based identity	Present identity formation shows Past experiences	cultural meanings shows Memory acts interact
10	Instability of selfhood	No fixed identity can achieved	postcolonial identity crisis shows through dialogue

Analytical Description Postcolonial Perspective

This Analytical Description Postcolonial Perspective shows Orientalism, as noted by Said (1978), is both a political structure and a way of thinking that forms representation even after colonial power has ceased. The study also finds that the novel's cultural depictions often create implicit hierarchies. The other is portrayed as far or culturally different, whereas the Self is linked to familiarity, emotional intimacy, and cultural validity. (Introduction. Selves and Society in Postcolonial India, 2010, pp. 1-20). This unfair framing reinforces rather than blurs the boundaries between groups, leading to ideological division. (Dakhil & Zhang, 2021) The persistence of colonial epistemologies that shape our understanding of difference is reflected in this kind of depiction.

Table 2
Finding of the Study

No.	Finding	Description in the Novel	Postcolonial Reference / Support
1	Identity as relational construction	Identity is formed through comparison between Self and Other rather than independently	Said (1978) argues that the Orient is defined in opposition to the West in <i>Orientalism</i>
2	Self/Other binary dominance	Characters' identities are shaped through oppositional cultural categorization	Bhabha (1994) explains identity as produced through difference and ambivalence
3	Orientalist discourse presence	Cultural perceptions reflect subtle colonial attitudes and representations	Said (1978) highlights how Orientalist discourse persists in cultural texts
4	Cultural hierarchy	Familiar identities are privileged over "Othered" identities	Said (1978) discusses hierarchical representation in colonial discourse
5	Fragmented subjectivity	Characters show unstable and divided identities	Bhabha (1994) concept of hybridity explains fragmented postcolonial identity
6	Psychological alienation	Characters experience disconnection from cultural belonging	Fanon (1967) describes alienation as a result of colonial impact on psyche
7	In-between identity space	Characters exist between multiple cultural frameworks	Bhabha (1994) theory of "third space" or liminality
8	Persistence of colonial ideology	Colonial ways of thinking continue after independence	Said (1978) notes the lasting influence of colonial discourse
9	Role of memory in identity	Memory shapes self-perception and cultural belonging	Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (2002) emphasize memory in postcolonial identity
10	Identity instability	No fixed identity is achieved; it remains fluid and contested	Hall (1990) describes identity as constantly changing in postcolonial contexts

Conclusion

The study finds that *Anguish of Separation* offers a critical postcolonial analysis of identity shaped by the Self/Other dichotomy and Orientalist discourse. Different studies indicate that colonial ideologies directly impact cultural perceptions, which are constructed during the identity period of independence. Edward Said's theoretical framework indicates a cultural and historical displacement in which psychological alienation and memory differentiation play vital roles in the formation of selfhood and identity, which remain fluid and unstable. Colonial discourse on postcolonial emphasizes complexity and continual negotiation. The findings showcase a number of implications: First of all, it draws attention to the study of less canonized Partition texts which encourages their inclusion in academic discourse. Secondly, it reinforces applying trauma theory to postcolonial contexts. Thirdly, the study also demonstrates how postcolonial discourse shapes post political independence. And finally, the study encourages to read the novel as a counter memory and approach it as a site of psychological and ideological contestation. This study has contributed significantly, however, it has some limitation for scholarly expansion. One of the limitations of the study is that the analysis is based on single text *Anguish of Separation* which limits insights gained through comparative studies

with other novels of the partition. Moreover, feminist theory or memory study can enrich insights. More significant areas of the limitation is that the current study is based on translation. Therefore, detailed understanding of the original Sindhi text may go unexplored.

Recommendation

Future researches may include comparative studies by comparing *Anguish of Separation* with canonical works such as *Ice-candy-Man* and *Train to Pakistan*. Secondly, feminist trauma frameworks can unpack suffering of women who were abducted, sexually abused and silenced

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