

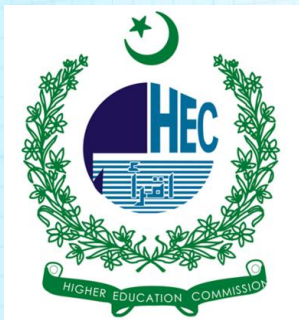
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**A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective of Sherman Alexie's Short
Story "The Search Engine"**



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Abstract

The present paper aims to analyze a postcolonial feminist perspective of Sherman Alexie's short story "The Search of Engine" in the Native American context. According to Postcolonial feminist perspective being a universal entity or group, women must be defined on the basis of their gender not on the basis of their social status, race, color, and ethnicity or on the basis of sexual preference. Its main aim is to focus its attention on the experiences of women in the Western and former colonized cultures to give an account of how the nonwestern or the non-white women in these colonies face racism and that how are they affected politically, economically and culturally by the colonialism where women are often misrepresented, oppressed and marginalized. The paper aims to address the question that how Corliss, the leading character in the short story, struggles to survive in the Native American culture and that how she is underestimated by the social factors. The paper is qualitative in nature as it deals with the behaviors and day today experiences of Corliss. Gayatri Spivak (1985, 1988)'s postcolonial feminist literary criticism has been applied to highlight the importance of women in the colonized cultures as she believes that women in these cultures are mal-treated, marginalized and silenced and by applying her concept the writer has explored the issues of non-native American women among the Native-American people who are also under the influence of postcolonialism. The study highlights Corliss as a highly educated woman with having an excellent taste for reading of English literary works, possess a pride on her entity as Indian-ness that is unacceptable to her family. Her literacy and attitude towards the Native American and Indians reveals a unique postcolonial feminist perspective in the story.

Keywords: Post colonialism, feminist perspective, White or Native Amerians, Non-Native or Non –White Americans

Introduction

Sherman Alexie is a well-known novelist, filmmaker and short story writer. He is mainly inspired by his own genius, thoughts and emotions. He is one of the finest Native American writers also. According to Bocket (2016) "He is one of the popular,

provocative and cosmopolitan native author of the recent time”. Whereas according to Donohue (2008) in his research publication under the title “Travels in Salinas and Spokane: John Steinbeck and Sherman Alexie as Cultural Explorers” states that born on October 7, 1966 in a Native American tribe, Spokane Washington, the projection of the lives and the emotions of his clan, especially of the women, are his special concerns in his works. His social background has a strong influence and effect on his literary works and writings. Wyman (2014) in his research article under the title “Telling Identities: Sherman Alexie’s War Dances” has called him the man who is a master in the art of constructing short stories and in the manifestation of the real world and human identities. The issue of women or the theme of feminism also finds its place in his work as he takes great interest in the issues of women of the Native American culture.

There are different perspectives in the Native American literature that prompt the attention of the readers and critics towards the issues of women, especially their status and image in the social set-up. In this context the words of Green (2000) and Mandell (2004), are worthy to be noted. According to them women in the Native American literature have been depicted either as stereotype princesses or they have been portrayed as degraded, violent and filthy creatures worthy of nothing. Keeping the above background the present paper aims to highlight a postcolonial perspective of feminism in the short story “The Search Engine” from the book under the title “Ten Little Indians” written by Sherman Alexie in the year 2003.

Research Question

How does the short story “The Search Engine” written by Sherman Alexie illustrate the postcolonial feminism perspective?

Research Question

To highlight the postcolonial feminist narrative.

To point out the postcolonial feminist perspective of the Sherman Alexie.

Postcolonial Feminism: An Overview

The concept and emergence of postcolonial feminism started with the emergence of colonialism and its fall. Though the colonialism was also not a good era for women as they were also under the verge of exploitation and marginalization of one kind and another. During this arena, they were made slaves in the shape of maids by the

colonizers. They were deprived of all human rights. The only purpose to keep them alive was to do household chores and to produce more labour force for the colonizers. According to Al-wazedi (2020), in his book under the title “Postcolonial Feminism. Companion to Feminist Studies” postcolonial feminism is the result of postcolonial theory that started due to the destruction of indigenous people’s history by the colonizers and its main purpose is criticize the colonial powers along with the hegemonic powers who set rules for the exploitation and marginalization of women in the social set up. According to Chamber and Watkins (2012) in their research article under the title “Postcolonial and Feminism” state that postcolonial feminism generally deals with the issue of gender and sexuality but it also deals with the issue of nation, race and empire. Keeping in view we can say under the light of the above statement that the postcolonial feminism deals with the discussion of women’s important issues and tries to address them and to find out a viable solution for them.

In this context the words of Kernal (2017) in his journal under the title” Power and Inequality in intersectional and postcolonial Feminist Theories: Current Sociology, are worthy to be noted. According to him “postcolonial feminist theory has addressed the relation of difference, heterogeneity and hierarchy within gender groups along with the entanglement of various forms of difference, power and inequality for a long time. Whereas Anderson(2004) in his article entitled with “ Lessons from a postcolonial Feminist Perspective: Suffering and a Path is Healing” states that its pertinent to understand that the tested postcolonial theories are adequate to enhance our understanding of human sufferings in the social, health and material conditions and to open up an avenue to healing.

Tejero (2013) in his research article under the title “Postcolonial Feminism how to Avoid Prejudice” argues regarding the concept of Postcolonial Feminism that it addresses the issues of feminism and explain that how the colonial and postcolonial literature represents women as well as it challenges the narrative about them in the literary and the social setup. He says “Postcolonial feminist point out the ways in which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized ironically sometimes by the postcolonial authors who might claim to be challenging a culture of oppression”.

Methodology. Research Method for Data Analysis

The present research paper is qualitative in nature which aims to highlight the

postcolonial feminist perspective of the short story “The Search Engine” written by Sherman Alexie. Qualitative research deals with the social problems due to which it is mostly carried out in the social sciences. Human behavior and human nature are its key tools for the analysis and interpretation of a social problem in general. It involves qualitative data collection and analysis to find out the solution of the problem under discussion. The social problem, here discussed in this research paper, is highlighted in the literary work through literary criticism. Literary criticism involves a literary theory for the sake of interpretation and evaluation of a literary work. The text of the short story of “The Search Engine” has been used as the data resource whereas, Gaytri Spvak’s (1985) postcolonial feminist literary criticism has been used and applied as a mean of conceptual data analysis. Moreover, close reading has been used as a source of interpretation which involves extensive general observation for the purpose of wide-ranging interpretation, observation and reflections. The stylistics features such as the style, the genre of the text, its author and a profound study of the literary era of the work are also used for the purpose of precise interpretation.

The data collected in this paper is in the form of words and for this purpose the various important paragraphs and lines in the story have been selected by the researcher to pursue his underline issue. The character of Corliss is the key character as it builds up and narrates the postcolonial feminist perspective of the writer.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The central character in the short story “The Search Engine” written by Sherman Alexie is “Corliss” who is the mouth piece of the novelist. She is a young Spokane Indian lady who lives in Washington. She comes from an Indian family and studies English Literature at University of Washington. The character of Corliss denies the image of a typical stereotype Indian girl as she is a well-educated and having her own distinct attitude towards the Indians and the White People. Her attitude and behavior changes with passage of time as the Native Americans come out from the tribal clans as a result a big change occurs in their traditional lifestyle as well as in their approach towards the Non-Native Americans. This changing attitude of the Native affects the women in American culture deeply making the situations more challenging and too difficult as well.

The search Engine is the story of the sustainability of a young Indian girl in American

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culture. Born in the Spokane tribe in a Native American social set-up in Washington. She lives in a joint family. She is very nice, honoured and respected by all her family members because of her good nature, wisdom and demeanor due to which the postcolonial feminist perspective can be best exemplified in her character. Being Indian Spokane, she is also attracted towards the literature of the White or Native American. She reads the English literature at the Washington University. The English literature is the literature of the powerful and the colonizers that's why she wants to read it in place of her own native literature. It's a clear reflection of the colonizer's deep effect on her life and which is also a clear manifestation of her mentality to take deep interest in the white- people and her low level interest of the Indian people.

Again her attitude towards the Western or White people and towards the Indian reflects the instinct of the post colonialism mind set up. Corliss has been depicted as a strange wonderful woman character in the story. The writer has thus given us the clue that manifests his own postcolonial mind setup. Because the women in the Native American society is independent but as she belongs to the Indian Spokane tribe, her emancipation and liberty made strange and wonderful by Sherman Alexie. She is free in her choice of education and also in decision making, she critically examines the life style of the White people and also doesn't resist against her family members' usage of derogatory words against them.

Corliss has a deep love for education which again looks strange and appreciable according to Sherman. Likewise other illiterate and uneducated Indian women, she wants to get education as much as possible. Sherman depiction of her love of education highlights his intention to traditional tribal system of The Indian society in which education is a big issue and is not acceptable to most of the people in the society. Again it is a reflection of Sherman's belief that the Spokane Indian tribe is conservative and reserve in matter of women's education because of being effected and influenced by the colonizers. The Spokane tribe's hatred towards the White or the Native American is also a postcolonial tendency towards the White people like the other colonizers people. Corliss's love of books is expressed in these words by Sherman "buried in a coffin filled with used paperbacks (TSE, P.5) and has "never met one human being more interesting to her than a good book" (TSE, P.10).

Like many of the postcolonial writers, Sherman Alexie also expresses his dislike and

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hatred of the Native American which we find in this novel in the character of the Indian Spokane tribe personnel. The Indians' hatred and suspicious nature of the White or the Native American is clearly depicted in the following paragraphs "The Indian men were suspicious on anything of 'white book' this can be seen from the incident when Corliss brings a book and her uncle calls it a "White book". The lines clearly depicts the wide gulf of hatred between the Indian and the Native American. The Indians hate even a white book which they think might have been written by the Native Americans. It's due to this strong dislikeness and hatred that Corliss is prevented from studying the English literature by her tribe.

The metanarrative quality of the postcolonial writers is also depicted in the novel. Sherman Alexie as a postcolonial writer, like many, likes to criticize the colonizers who depict themselves as civilized and enlightened people. They always depicts themselves as heroes whose sole duty is to give civilization to other people. They ruled the world with every kind of cruelty in order to keep them on the saddle. This narrative has been depicted by Sherman in these lines through the mouth of Corliss' Uncle "white people were killing Indians in the 19C. I bet this Hopkins dude was killing Indians, too" (TSE, P.13). Again "oh! Corliss, these Catholics were the worst. Your grandmother still has scars on her back from when a priest and a nun whipped her in boarding school. You shouldn't be reading that stuff. It will pollute your heart" (TSE, P.14). The lines Sherman Alexie's criticism of the Native American as well as their literary works who certainly pollute the minds of the readers including the Indians.

The following lines also depicts Sherman's hatred of the Native or White American and their financial exploitation of the Indians, their vanity and false arrogance through the mouth of Corliss. According to Corliss the white businessmen are the worst of all the white people due to their pride and arrogance. It is these white arrogant white businessmen that pave the ways for the Native Americans to subdue the poor and Non Native American tribes. She knows that it's the white people who are the responsible for the making the Indian and other as colonized and thus have added to many of their miseries and problems as described in the following lines by her;

Sure, she hated all sort of white people- the arrogant white

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businessmen... it was easy to hate white vanity and white rage and white arrogance, but what about white poetry? Maybe it wasn't about whiteness or redness or any other color. Corliss wasn't naïve. She knew racism, tribalism, and nationalism were encoded in Human DNA.... However, she also wanted to believe in human goodness and moral grace (TSE, P.14)

Nationhood and nationalism is an important quality of the postcolonial literature which is also highlighted by Sherman Alexie in through the character of Corliss. Being an Indian, she wants to keep her identity as Indian aboriginal girl safe at any cost. Her determination as an independent girl is clear in these lines "She wanted a maximum life, an original aboriginal life". She is not a typical woman who is limited to the household shores only. She wants to lead a dynamic and meaningful life. It is due to this reason also that she wants to reads the English literature as it belongs to the white, dominant race. She is extremely worried about her own identity and is not ready to make any compromise on it. She wants that people respect her as an Indian girl. She is proud of herself as an Indian and calls herself as an Indian Aboriginal proudly in the social circle in the Native American culture.

As a postcolonial writer Sherman Alexie has also highlighted the hardships, sufferings and poverty of the Indians in the Native American culture through the character of Corliss. She is poverty stricken and faces many difficulty to manage her education expenses. In spite of poverty stricken, her family and tribe support her financially by sending her twenty-dollar bill each month as narrated by the writer in the following lines:

How many time had she opened an envelope and discovered a miraculous twenty-dollar bill? The family and the tribe were helping her, so maybe she was a selfish bitch for questioning the usefulness of tribalism. Here she was sitting in a corner of her tiny apartment, pretending to be alone in the world, the one poetic Spokane, and she was reading a book of poems, of sonnets, by another Spokane (TSE, P.14).

She works to collect aluminum cans for selling in the summer break which enable her to SAT-prep course. Her labor and hard work make her able to win scholarship for her

further studies. Her laborious life history is described in these words also by the novelist;

“At the beginning of every semester, Corliss had called the history and English teacher at the local prep school she couldn’t afford, and asked what books they would be reading in class, and she had found those books and lived with them like siblings (TSE, P.5).

The above lines also depict the problems faced by the Indian women in the field of education in the Native American culture, represented by Corliss who wants to get rid of her poverty and other problems through education.

The simplicity of the Indian tribalism and reflection of gender discrimination in the Indian society (third world country’s woman), is also reflected in the novel under the study by Sherman Alexie. Being an Indian he is fully aware of the hardships, sufferings and complexities of the women in the social setup. Corliss as a mouth piece of his feminist perspective reveals such issues in her speech from time to time on various occasion. Women are subdued and marginalized in the Indian as well as in the Native American culture alike. Through the character of Corliss, Sherman wants to state that how much challenges and hurdles are there in women’s life while making her fortune in the White people’s culture. As postcolonial writer he has also depicted the struggle of his leading character in the novel in these lines by Le May, G (2018) “In addition, she made a safe place by living alone, as the violence and discrimination often happened to Native women.

One of the major them of the colonial literature is the depiction of the Native as stereotyped. Sherman Alexie, through the character of Corliss has revealed this trait of the Indian people also. According to Corliss the Indian people are stereotyped without having any ambition in their life. According to her the teachers as well as the guidance counselors are producing only the stereotyped Indians, doing only the blue-collar jobs i-e busy in manual work such as agriculture, construction, maintenance and mining. As a result they earn less salary in spite of their hard work. She also reveals that the reason of their problems is that they never ask questions. According to Corliss, one should question about everything because it makes life easier and comfortable. It’s also the main reason of the subjugation of the Indian people that they don’t ask question as highlighted in the following lines by Sherman Alexie;

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Her father and uncles never asked questions. How can you live a special life without constantly interrogating it? How you can live a good life without poetry? She knew her family feared poetry, but they didn't fear it because they were Indian. The fear of poetry was multicultural and timeless (TSE, P.13).

Sherman Alexie has also highlights the Indians hatred of the poetry, especially the poetry of the White people. It's also one of the feature of postcolonial writers that they depicts their hatred and strong contradiction towards the colonizers in every sphere of life. Poetry as a means of the transmission of one's culture and civilization. It is a strong vehicle of one's mind and soul also. The colonizers often projects their propaganda and it is a great source of their colonizing as well as depicted in this novel also by the novelist through the mouth of the Corliss' Uncles. According to them the white men's poetry pollute the minds and hearts of the colonized and definitely it will affect Corliss too as stated in the following lines;

I bet you're reading one of those white books again, enit? The first uncle asked. His name is Gerard Manley Hopkins, said Corliss. He wrote poems in the nineteenth century. White people were killing Indians in the nineteenth century, the second uncle said. I don't think so Corliss said he was a Jesuit priest. Her father and uncle cursed with shock and disgust. He was a Catholic? her father asked. Oh, Corliss. Those Catholics were the worst. Your grandmother still has scars on her back from when a priest and a nun whipped her in boarding school. You shouldn't be reading that stuffs. It will pollute your heart (TSE, P.13-14)

Again Corliss' father and uncle advised her not to read the literature of the White people as it is nothing but a wastage of her precious time instead she should read law, politics or mathematics. It is their personal prejudice which they express regarding the poetry or literature of the Native Americans to her as they know that she is intelligent, wise and can be affected badly by reading it. The Indians prejudice about the Native American literature is expressed in these lines by Sherman Alexie;

You're pretty and smart, why are you wasting your time with poem?
You should be studying science and maths and law and politics. You're

going to be rich and famous. You're going to be the toughest Indian woman around (TSE, P.15)

Conclusion

The researcher, after a critical analysis of the short story "The Search Engine" from the book "the ten Little Indians" written by Sherman Alexie concludes that the short story highlights the postcolonial feminist perspective of the novelist on the basis of the following points;

1. Sherman Alexie expresses his postcolonial perspective through the character of Corliss, a woman.
2. The writer reveals his own identity as an Indian by expressing his prejudices against the Native or the White throughout the story through the character of Corliss.
3. The story strongly highlights the Native Americans social exploitation of the Indians.
4. The novelist objects the economical/financial exploitation of the Indians by the Native or the White.
5. The writer expresses his own concerns and apprehensions about reading the Native American's poetry and literature by the Indian woman and its consequences.
6. The story also reveals the hatred of the Indian tribe, the Spokane, towards the Native Americans.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following recommendations on the basis of his findings and conclusions;

1. The short story "The Search Engine" by Sherman Alexie expresses the postcolonial feminist perspective of the writer which can be also read from this perspective also.
2. The story can be proved as a viable contribution in the postcolonial feminist literature if it is analyzed critically from different perspectives of other postcolonial writers.
3. A comparative feminist analysis of this story with other stories can also be proved useful for further research in future.

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