

The Moonstone as an Anti-colonial Novel

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Abstract:

This research paper revolves around the idea whether The Moonstone is an anti-colonial novel or not. The study hypothesizes that the novel stands in opposition to imperialism as experienced by those pro-imperialist novels written during the Victorian period. It also hypothesizes that it is an allegory aimed at restoring dignity to the Indians whose sacred diamond has been sacrificed and lost forever. This paper is divided into three sections titled "Introduction," "Synopsis of the plot," and "The Moonstone as an Anti-colonial Novel".

المخلص:

تتمحور هذه الدراسة البحثية حول فكرة ما اذا كانت رواية The Moonstone رواية مناهضة للاستعمار ام لا . الدراسة افترضت ان الرواية تقف في وجه الامبريالية على النقيض من تلك الروايات التي كانت مؤيدة للاستعمار والتي كتبت خلال العصر الفيكتوري . كما تفترض الدراسة ان الرواية كانت بمثابة مجاز (اليغوريا) الذي يهدف الى إعادة الكرامة للهنود الذين ضُحي بجواهرتهم المقدسة وفُقدت إلى الأبد . هذه الدراسة البثية تقسم الى ثلاثة اقسام : (المقدمة) ، (ملخص الحبكة) ، (The Moonstone كرواية مناهضة للاستعمار)

Keywords: Moonstone , anti-colonial , Indian diamond , detective stories, Victorian period

Introduction

The Moonstone (1868), a novel by Wilkie Collins (1824–1889), is regarded by many critics as the first novel to deal with detective experiences. Though preceded by detective fictional arts like Edgar Allan Poe's The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841) and Charles Dickens's Bleak House, the former is a short story and the latter deals with broader themes than solving of a mystery. What is significant about the novel under consideration is the fact that it is based on realistic happenings .. (1). In the allegorical style, the historical records describing, in the novel, the loss of the Indian diamond which is a sacred religious relic and is symbolic of...

Indian nationalism. The diamond was offered to Queen Victoria as a present by the Punjab Maharaja. Thus, the novel can be taken as a historical document telling of the fact that the Indians have lost something precious. Collins makes use of this event and fictitiously builds up a narrative illustrating how detectives have managed to solve the problem related to the loss of an expensive diamond. As a matter of fact the diamond of the novel is not the one presented to Queen Victoria, which once mounted the British crown..(2) . For in 1849, the sovereign of Punjab gave that diamond, the moonstone or the fabulous Koh-i-Noor diamond,

as a present to her, a fact which was not accepted by the Indian nation, for the diamond was considered by them a national and symbolic yet precious relic:

Collins in his novel established a familiar pattern-an eccentric detective taking over a case from bumbling local police, clues gradually revealed to the reader as they are revealed to the detective, and the ultimate conviction of the least-Like support ..(3)

Out of the fact that the Indians have lost a diamond, sacred and precious, Collins manages to compose a very interesting detective novel. Interestingly speaking the diamond is still kept in the British royal museum. Van Dine (in Paul Grimstad, The Newyorker, Feb. 2nd, 2016) declares that the novel is characterized by those qualities which are most admired by T. S. Eliot, the unimpeachable authority among literary media past, present and future is regarded as one of those readers who are most interested in detective stories, whose literary judgments are undeniable. Dine unfolds those qualities, saying "a detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked out character analysis.".. (4)

Synopsis of the Plot

The Moonstone tells of the story of a young girl named Rachel Verinder who has inherited from her uncle an Indian diamond on her eighteenth birthday that is large and expensive. Her uncle, Colonel Herncastle, was a corrupt officer in the British army, who did his service in India. Besides its being valuable, the diamond is of a certain religious significance on the grounds that three Hindu priests endeavored during their lifetime to protect it from stealing. Moreover, the diamond is regarded as one that is legendary in that it pertains to Hope Diamond. During the birthday party Miss Verinder appears wearing the moonstone on her dress to be seen by all the guests including her cousin Franklin Blake and some Indian magicians who came to the house. At that very night, the moonstone was stolen when put in Rachel's bedroom, and there appears situations of disturbances, a state of confusion and disorder, unrest and fermentation, not to mention misunderstanding and sadness. Relying on the testimonies of some of the major characters, the theft has been traced; the thief, identified; the diamond, recovered.

The Moonstone as an Anti-colonial Novel:

The question whether The Moonstone is an anti-colonial novel has been controversial among literary media. However, this study advocates the idea that the novel is an anti-colonial one on the grounds that the majority of critics show their consensus agreement on this fact, relying on evidence to be obtained from the text of the novel and the logical inferences to be taken from the common sense of the Indian culture. The stolen stone is associated with a fertility god and vegetation. It has a holy position and has much to do with the religious and cultural heritage of the colonized India. Hearn castle killed in a dishonorable way to possess the stone and his action symbolically to show the ugliness of colonialism that happened throughout the British control. Being dishonorably possessed by the British colonizers, the stone lost its religious and cultural significance. For the British, it represents their major victory that was achieved in the time Britain ruled India. In fact, the writer managed to deal seriously with the Indian fears which shadow the course of the events in the

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story so as not to belittle the Indians as superstitious in comparison to the English. The stone's restoration to the original place shows that the stone would be best with the Indians themselves than the British as a form of recognition and self-esteem. In this regard, the novel is described as "the large narrative of imperialism, historical interpretation of Victorian sovereignty and world-historical power".. (5)

The segregation practiced against the Indians stems from the notion that the Indians are savages whose culture did not contribute to the history of human progress. They are categorized as inferior according to the imperial ideology, which marks the Indians as "Others" by differences in color, moral, and cultural distinction. In the *Moonstone*, the writer utilizes the literary devices of characterization foreshadowing, symbol, and stair to clarify the sense of anti-imperialism in the novel. He shows that "the Indian under dogs as more noble and wise rather than the Englishmen".. (6) The Indian priests are depicted as intelligent people not as simple-minded or savages people as most English people believe.

According to Gan Yan-Ping (<https://www.researchgate.net>), *The Moonstone* displays the destructive nature of the British empire and at the same time shows its sympathy towards the Indians. He proceeds to say that the novel has turned things upside down in that it has destroyed the common concept that the "English are good, Indians are evil," (Ibid.) a subversion which would figure out later on in most Victorian fictional works, for *The Moonstone* reflects Collins's "anti-imperialist thought" (Ibid.). Thus, the significance of the novel lies in its being anti-colonial one, when compared with the pro-colonial works of Collins's contemporaries.

It is indicated by Patricia Murphy that the readings of most critics indicate that *The Moonstone* is credited to be anti-imperialist, and that the diamond is a symbol of nationalism for the English, not a symbol of crime. 8 Murphy has explored a number of critics' opinions in this respect and found that the majority of them advocate the idea that the gem is a sign of the British crime and the novel is to be held as an anti-imperial one. The colonial setting of the novel has prompted many critics to explore the question of whether the novel is anti-colonial or not. Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina have their say in this regard:

Some scholars see an incipient anti-imperialism in *The Moonstone*, and others find the Indian locales as mere exoticism which actually furthers the colonial project. While an anti-colonial reading of some sensation fiction is certainly possible. 10

According to Amel Osman El-Rayis, most of the novels written during the Victorian period glorify the British empire, which contributes to reinforcing the imperial aspirations and portrays the colonized nations as being uncivilized. (11) El-Rayis says, on the other

Hand, that Collins does not fit within this domain, declaring that an anti-colonial attitudes are being held by the author. "instead of creating the Indians as the uncivilized foreigners, they are fairly described as decent gentlemen." (12)

The entire mystery to be solved in the novel is the disappearance of the Indian diamond, which prompts Collins to record an actual event, using an allegory. The allegory in the novel can be described as being representing the stealing of the diamond by an Englishman from its legal owner. This act of stealing stands for the fact that the act of giving the diamond to Queen Victoria is regarded as a crime. Throughout the complications of the novel describing the meticulous investigation in this matter, the criminal has been appointed and the diamond has been reclaimed. In the novel, the diamond has been stolen from a Hindu priest by an Englishman, in the same way India has been stolen by English colonial power. Retrieving the diamond to India again may be symbolic of the notion that Britain has exposed its failure in India which has ultimately restored its self-sovereignty:

Of course, if the Moonstone represents India, what are we to make of the 'flaw' at the center of the diamond? Perhaps the flaw represents a fundamental flaw in England's perception of India, or a 'flaw' in their colonial project. Or, perhaps, the flaw is Collins's subtle suggestion that India, itself, has some fundamental flaw. (13)

Conclusion:

As a conclusion, the allegorical implications of the novel are not set haphazardly. Collins definitely aims to say that the actual Indian diamond is an act of crime on the part of the Punjab Sovereign who has given up the sacred and religious yet national diamond, which is the property of a nation, not the property of one single person.

Likewise, the entire India has been stolen by the British, which represents to them a very precious diamond whose restoration in the novel represents the Indians' reclaim of their dignity when they have got their independence. Therefore, Collins has given his attitude towards his attitude in the novel, implying that it is an anti-colonial one the actual diamond, the Koh-I-Noor-diamond belongs to the Indian nation which allegorically represents India which belongs to the Indian nation as well. Thus, poetic justice has been achieved in the novel which denounces imperialism as a grave crime.

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