

Orientalizing the Orient: A Critique of Colonial Encounters

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Abstract: *The study is based on investigating how Mircea Eliade, the Romanian philosopher and comparative religion scholar as a representative of European colonialism in India, while documenting colonial encounters in his Bengal Nights: A Novel, ends up Orientalizing the orient in Eurocentric manners. Following Said's insights on orientalism and Spivak's critique of imperialism, it has been upheld that the novelist makes the Indian cultural illustrations in such a style that justifies the Europeans' mission of colonizing the land and hence the occupied land due to the orientalist's fractional scholarship could never truly obtain a west-free representation throughout the text. The standard of sanity/rationality is Europe and its peripheries are merely the copiers of the great values coming from this fountainhead of civilization. Hence, the novel is not a love-story, but a pro-colonial document that fortifies and reiterates colonial ideology; a blessing that Eliade brought to India to enlighten it with awareness and civilization. To conclude, "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, Oriental, and his world".*

Keywords: Orientalism, Imperialism, Colonial Discourse, Racism, Colonial Encounters

Introduction

Mircea Eliade's novel, *Bengal Nights* describes India and its peoples especially women in quite an imperialist/orientalist fashion. Eliade, a renowned Romanian philosopher, historian, comparative religion scholar and novelist, came to India to pursue his career as a railway engineer. On seeing his interest in learning ancient Indian philosophy, Surendranath Dasgupta, professor of philosophy at Calcutta University and a leading academic expert on Indian philosophy and Sanskrit language, invited him to stay at his home. During the stay at his teacher's home, Eliade fell in love with his gifted daughter, Maitreyi Devi, who herself was a published poet at the age of sixteen. On knowing his secret love-affair with his daughter, Dasgupta banished him from his home. Insulted and disheartened, Eliade wrote the novel entitled, *Maitreyi* in Romanian language in 1933, translated into French as *La Nuit Bengali* in 1950 and in English as *Bengal Nights* in 1994. Viewed from the perspective of postcolonial theory furnished by Said in *Orientalism*¹ and Spivak in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"², the researcher contends that novel, being a semi-autobiographical love story, not only records Alain's (as Eliade names himself in the novel) encounters with his Indian sweetheart, Devi but also Orientalizes the orient by othering it as primitive and barbarous.

In view of that, in Hans Bertens' opinion, postcolonial theory may reformulate, redefine and reconstruct the colonizer/colonized's contact zones by specifically focusing on colonial experiences from the colonized's viewpoints.³ In the initial stages, postcolonial literature was taken as a nationalist form of writing and from this perspective, "post coloniality can be defined as that condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical agents in an increasingly globalized world".⁴ Said is considered the founding figure of postcolonial studies as his classic work *Orientalism*, demonstrates how Western discourse on the Orient is a mode of the former's exercising power and domination over the latter.⁵ For Said, the orientalists, that is the so-called European intelligentsia who aimed at elucidating the otherwise opaque and complex orient in order to award it representation ended up ideologically and imaginatively portraying and describing the Orientals as passive, primitives and barbarians and hence

1 Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Publications, 1978).40

2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and A Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1, (1985).

3 Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2007), 95.

4 Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

5 Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Publications, 1978).

in dire need of western enlightenment projects.⁶ So, Orientalism might be defined as a Western device for describing, dominating, and restructuring the orient in such a partial manner that it ultimately ensures the orientalists' authority over the Orient.⁷

Said maintains that the Orientalists make the Orientals as the subject of their imaginative inquiry and by using discursive strategies study them from a Eurocentric worldview and form a uniform albeit prejudiced view about them, and also treat them as uncivilized Others and themselves as civilized and the torch-bearers of civilization to foreign lands (3-4).⁸ For that reason, orientalism constructed East and West as the two distinct cultural domains with an unbridgeable gap between them and accordingly "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self".⁹ In the novel, Eliade was proud of his services that he rendered as railways engineer for the construction of modern India, for he considered his job better than writing books about India: "My work on the construction of railway lines through the jungle seemed to me far more useful to India than a dozen books written about her".¹⁰ This shows that Eliade was on a civilizing mission in India: "Through Orientalism, the 'Orient' came to be understood as, among other things, irrational, backward, sexualised and feminised, as opposed to the rational, developed, civilised and masculine West" (Lampert-Weissig 2010, 12).¹¹ Boehmer (2005) holds a similar perspective when she says that "the white man represented himself as the archetypal worker and provident profit-maker," for "he built railway grids, administrative centres" and "cities" in foreign lands.¹² Byrne also emphasizes that for Bhabha colonial discourse is the major discursive strategy through which the colonizers construct knowledge about the colonized. She has argued that as the stereotypical colonial discourse stands for splitting and multiple beliefs, therefore it requires an unceasing and repetitive chain of other stereotypes for its successful functioning in colonial settings.¹³ In the words of Bhabha, "the same old stories must be told again and again and afresh, and are differently

6 Said, 2-3.

7 Said, 3.

8 Said, 3-4.

9 Said, 4.

10 Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, trans. Catherine Spenser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

11 Lisa Lampert-Weissing, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

12 Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 38.

13 Eleanor Byrne, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 80.

gratifying and terrifying each time,” and consequently colonial scholarship on the colonized “vacillates between what is always ‘in place’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated”.¹⁴ This is what we have seen in the above-mentioned lines from the novel in which Eliade solely decides that his presence in India is a blessing for Indians.

Being on a civilizing mission in India, Eliade practically does what Spivak calls as axiomatic imperial “discursive field” that is, through the animation of distinct “systems of signs” each based on a specific axiomatic meaning, imperialism generates the possibility of only one signification which in turn favors its ideological positioning.¹⁵ When I term Eliade’s novel as an orientalist text, I mean how women’s representation in the novel is filtered through what Spivak calls “axiomatics of imperialism”.¹⁶ Because, it is through this method that the novel reduces Indian women to a homogenous class primitivism and sustains their Othering. Indeed, the colonizers saw the orientalist’s imaginative commands as a prerequisite for successfully exerting their control over a nation and its territory because controlling the colonized merely on the basis of economic and political powers would not have been possible. Simply put, in an attempt to make sense of the complex and strange world of India, Eliade Eurocentrically designed conventional codes and symbols to transparently decipher the colonized opaque cultures for European readers.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and the theoretical framework consists of Postcolonial Critical Theory garnered from the postcolonial rereading of colonial texts. The technique of close-reading is used for critical consideration of the selected lines/passages from the novels in the light of the above referred theory. By using Said’s (post) colonial theory, I first look at how Eliade’s novel is a Eurocentric text. Secondly, by employing Spivak’s critiques of imperialism in the background, it is to see how the novel can be categorized as an imperialist and racist text which partially depicts Indian women in general and Devi, the heroine of the novel in particular. Indeed, postcolonial theory put forward the idea that colonial literature omitted the history of the colonized by silencing them and the same has been validated in the novel at hand. Said’s *Orientalism*, being the founding

14 Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 74-76.

15 Spivak, *Critical Inquiry*, 247.

16 Spivak 243.

text of postcolonial studies is used as theoretical framework for doing a postcolonial rereading of the novel. The book emphasizes that colonial systems were not operating on the basis of political powers alone but in collaboration with the imaginative writings of the orientalists which provided logical and ideological support to those same oppressing systems in the name of turning the colonized into cultured peoples. In the novel, Eliade is preoccupied with ideological obsessions about fixing Others as primitives and barbarians and thus manifesting the orientalists' self-styled description, classification and definition of those same fixations in the name of bringing civilization to India.

Racial Discrimination, Imperialism and Orientalizing the Orient: A Critique of Colonial Encounters in *Bengal Nights*

According to Ashcroft et al colonial discourse instead of highlighting the exploitation of the resources of the colonized rather obscures the colonial agendas which support the subordination of the colonized: "The primitive nature of other races, the barbaric depravity of colonized societies, and therefore the duty of the imperial power to reproduce itself in the colonial society, and to advance the civilization of the colony through trade, administration, cultural and moral improvement".¹⁷ I will be reading how Devi's figure has been manufactured by the axiomatics of imperialism. For Boehmer, colonialism must not be confused with imperialism which refers to the economic and military power which a state assumes over another territory and it is expressed either in pageantry or in symbolic manners/language. Imperialism is explicitly associated with ideological mechanisms which provide a continuous support for colonialism, which is "the consolidation of imperial power, and is manifested in the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands, often by force".¹⁸ According to Lampert-Weissig, racism takes place "when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates, excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes are hereditary and unalterable".¹⁹

But Ashcroft et al have argued that with the rise of colonialism, race particularly became pertinent because the readymade division of human beings by colonialist powers was not only for the sake of establishing the imperial enterprise but it also assisted them in sustaining an

¹⁷ Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁸ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2.

¹⁹ Lampert-Weissig, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, 71.

unchallenged dominance over the conquered races: “Race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the same impetus to draw a binary distinction between ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’ and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types”. In this way, European racial thinking instigated a hierarchy of human difference that was supportive to imperialism’s self-vindicating project of enlightenment and as a result “the idea of superiority that generated the emergence of race as a concept adapted easily to both impulses of the imperial mission: dominance and enlightenment”.²⁰ I argue that in Eliade’s novel, imperialism, racism and colonial discourse go hand in hand resulting in Orientalizing the orient men/women in general and Devi in particular as inferior and debased creatures. In this regard, the narrator/Eliade tells us that when he first saw Devi, he felt very strange about her in terms of her looks and physical appearance. He thought of her as “ugly” and her eyes failing to meet the European standard of beauty were “too large and too black” with “thick and curling lips and the powerful chesta Bengali maiden who had developed too quickly”.²¹ So, Devi is being depicted in an exotic, racial and fascinating manner. For Hema Chari, the British in order to enforce their colonialist and orientalist views depict the colonized peoples and their cultures as morally, socially, psychologically, and intellectually of substandard nature.²²

Devi seems a mystery to Eliade’s imperialist gaze and therefore he decides to make her clear for himself and for the European world. His Orientalizing observation informs us that her naked arms and their strange somber brown color is so disturbing and even “unfeminine” that her body resembles “the flesh of a goddess or a painted image rather than of a human”.²³ By sketching Devi in a surrealist manner, Eliade takes her to the world which belongs not to humans but gods. At any cost, he is not ready to accept her as a human being, but a special being that belongs to some supernatural world. It is this axiomatic discursive style of writing that according to Spivak is the hallmark of imperialist literatures and therefore, “the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored”.²⁴ Stoler has also enunciated that “imperial authority and racial distinctions were

20 Aschroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies*, 180-181.

21 Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 1.

22 Hema Chari, “Scripting Woman into the Discourse of Nostalgia: Gender and the Nation State,” in *Narratives of Nostalgia: Gender and Nationalism*, ed. Suzanne Kehde and Jean Pickering (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 124.

23 Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 2.

24 Spivak, *Critical Inquiry*, 243.

fundamentally structured in gendered terms”.²⁵ Moreover, Devi might have some human qualities, but in the eyes of her colonial observer, she fails to demonstrate the qualities necessary for a proper human being. It is due to such a colonial mindset that Spivak emphasizes the need for rediscovering and revisiting the imperialist literature that creates a narrative of worlding, a narrative which supports European colonizing social mission by stereotypically projecting the image of the third world women as backwards and primitives: “To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and circularized in English translation fosters the emergence of “the Third World” as a signifier that allows us to forget that “worlding,” even as it expands the empire of the literary discipline”.²⁶

Eliade’s European friend, Harold is shocked when he comes to know that Eliade has fallen in love with Devi because for him, Indian girls are “disgusting” and “dirty”.²⁷ Strikingly, Eliade does not react to such sickening remarks and also does not even bother to counter his friend’s prejudiced mindset against Indian women. Rather, we are told that the biased judgments of his friend cast “curious impressions”²⁸ on his mind: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences”.²⁹ Likewise, Eliade’s another European friend Lucien Metz who wanted to write a book on modern India, showed Eliade the photographs/notes and the interviews that he conducted in India in order to collect data for publishing the book.³⁰ These facts reinstate both Metz and Eliade’s anthropological zeal in studying Indian society. Metz’s manuscript lacks the chapter on Indian women because so far, he has not encountered any “real Indian Woman”.³¹ So, he has very vague notions about these women. Like Metz, Eliade admits that he himself barely knows anything about Indian Women and therefore fails to teach his friend anything about these women’s manners/habits. As a result, they plan a meeting with Devi, with her father’s permission so that after precisely observing her they

²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (California: University of California Press, 2010).

²⁶ Spivak, *Critical Inquiry*, 243.

²⁷ Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 2.

²⁸ Eliade, 2.

²⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

³⁰ Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 5.

³¹ Eliade, 5.

can document their observations for western readers. Metz's curious colonial zeal of observing Indian women gets translated through his meticulously and "more closely"³² witnessing Devi because with an anthropological enthusiasm he continues documenting his experiences/views about her body, jewelry and dress-code. In view of Said, what gave the Oriental world its identity and intelligibility was not "the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. The Orient was viewed as if framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual".³³

Eliade also tells us that throughout the examination process, Devi is confused and frightened, drawing herself near to the window, with lips quivering and shawl pulled very nicely over her head in a typical Indian style: "It was a strange examination. Lucien weighed up the jewels in his hand, giving exclamations of wonder, asked questions and took down the answers in shorthand. During all this, Maitreyi stood, her face ashen, trembling from head to foot as though stricken with pure terror".³⁴ The lines not only show how the orientalists exploit the knowledge/power nexus to construct orientalist discourse on their ethnic and cultural others but also indicate that the Orient is absolutely a European brainchild and since antiquity it had been a place of romance for them. If we take the above-mentioned lines on the level of extended metaphor, then we can say that Devi is a representative of the Orient, which has been invariably, as observed by Said, a problem, an "exotic being"³⁵ and a riddle to be solved and analyzed:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.³⁶

Evidently, Devi is being scrutinized in an archetypal/anthropological European fashion. Eliade even goes on to assume that she is extremely amused/happy of their "merry company" (13). Although, throughout the meeting she does not utter even a single word, yet being in the colonial-laboratory run by Eliade and Metz and being unable to speak for herself, she is bound to live with the image

³² Eliade, 5.

³³ Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

³⁴ Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 7.

³⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

³⁶ Said, 3.

that is bestowed upon her by the two colonialist scientists, who very generously did a scientific investigation of her body and dress customs. Eliade, by following the nineteenth century French novelist, Gustave Flaubert's discursive strategies is able to dominate his beloved, possess her physically and speak on her behalf to his readers by telling them how characteristically she is Oriental. Said argues that the relationship between orient and occident is a relationship of domination, power and of a complex hegemony and the same has been reflected in Flaubert's discursive tactics that he employs to represent the Egyptian women.³⁷ Additionally, for Said, "the Oriental woman is an occasion and an opportunity for Flaubert's musings; he is entranced by her self-sufficiency, by her emotional carelessness, and also by what, lying next to him, she allows him to think".³⁸

Said therefore maintains that Flaubert produces an extensively persuasive classic of the Oriental woman, who "never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male".³⁹ The same colonialist/orientalist discourse is being revived by Eliade because just like Flaubert, he successfully silences the Indian women in his text. For, he never allowed them to speak for their concerns whatsoever. Not only colonized women have been curious to Eliade, but equally fascinating is their living place which is dubbed as a "curious place".⁴⁰ Likewise, the things/furniture items at Devi's house are also "found strange and incomprehensible". In addition, the rituals/customs that govern the behaviors of Indian women are also titled as "obscure ceremonial".⁴¹ Despite all his efforts, Eliade remains uncertain as to how he can draw an exact picture of Devi in his mind, as he presumes: "Was she stupid, like all young girls, are genuinely simple, a primitive, as I imagine all Indian girls to be".⁴² We see how he uses imperial license to deprive the Indian women of their diversity and places them under a homogenous class of primitives. For Said, orientalism has its roots in what he calls "the idea of Europe" that is "a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans" and this is arguably the major component that sustains the hegemony of European culture in and outside Europe: "There is in addition the

37 Said, 5-6.

38 Said, 187.

39 Said, 6.

40 Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 9.

41 Eliade, 28.

42 Eliade, 29.

hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter”.⁴³ The Indian customs of marriage and eating are recorded as “idiocies” not meeting the European standards.⁴⁴

If we look at Devi’s representation from Spivak’s point of view, then she is “not-yet-human” and therefore is in the dire need of western enlightenment.⁴⁵ But Spivak categorically determines: “No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self”.⁴⁶ Equally attention grabbing is the fact that after beholding Devi quizzically, Eliade asserts that she is “inhuman, miraculous and hardly real”. He also goes on to state the perplexity that he faced the moment he watched her: “I could not fathom the mystery that lay hidden in this creature”.⁴⁷ The words “mystery” and “inhuman” are enough to show how Devi is rendered as a riddle or problem to be solved. Although Devi’s spectacular presence evokes fascination, desire, and pleasure as well as compassion, yet being an item of imperial curiosity, she is reduced to an erotic phenomenon signaling all that is alien, strange, monstrous and sexually deviant. As an individual of outstanding sight of flesh and touch before Eliade’s ethnographic eyes, she is everlastingly locked beyond history and time: “The imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged”.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Eliade is very much proud of his position “as white civilizer” in India.⁴⁹ According to David Cave, the sole reason of Eliade’s visiting India was “to study first-hand the Oriental culture with which he was well familiar through books. He also came to make his own cultural creations, and, in his own way through authentic experiences, to seek the absolute”.⁵⁰ It is chiefly due this civilizing task,

43 Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

44 Said, 39.

45 Spivak, *Critical Inquiry*, 247.

46 Spivak, 253.

47 Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 7.

48 Said, *Orientalism*, 8.

49 Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 12.

50 David Cave, *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

that he regards his duty as a railway engineer better than writing dozen books about India, which hitherto had been a source of amusement to him because of the “sensational newspaper article or books” that he read about it.⁵¹ It also indicates how Europeans or colonizers rely on colonialist discourse to form an opinion about the orient: “Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, “there” in discourse about it”.⁵² Throughout the novel, he lingers on fabricating Devi’s speculative image through his distorted perceptions, especially, whenever she is equated with the women of his enlightening Centre, Europe.

Additionally, not only Eliade misrepresents Devi but the other white female characters in the novel also follow the same national outlook in describing her and other Indian women. In this regard, Eliad’s girlfriend, Clara with whom he used to share his troubles, when she first looked at Devi said: “she isn’t ugly at all. Only, she seems dirty, like all negroes. What on earth does she put in her hair?”.⁵³ One can see that not only does the white man/Eliade marginalize the colored woman but the white woman also does the same: “Charged with guarding cultural norms, European women were instrumental in promoting white solidarity”.⁵⁴ It does not make a great difference as to who the observer is, whether European male like Eliade or European woman like Clara, in either case the result is same and that is the marginalization of Indian women: “The colonial politics of exclusion was contingent on constructing categories. Colonial control was predicated on identifying who was “white,” who was “native,” and which children could become citizens rather than subjects”.⁵⁵ Also, when Eliade insists on remaining with Devi who is termed as “*dirty* Bengal woman”⁵⁶. Clara remains silent and does not react to such degrading remarks against her because being a white woman, Clara belongs to a civilized community of women and has the license to represent her, the way she deems appropriate.

Also, when contrasted with western women, it is the confidence that Devi lacks in facing the civilized white women. For, we are told that in the presence of Western women, Devi “looked around her with a lively

⁵¹ Cave, 15.

⁵² Said, *Orientalism*, 22.

⁵³ Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 26.

⁵⁴ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 60.

⁵⁵ Stoler, 43.

⁵⁶ Eliade, 164

curiosity that was constantly tinged with a suggestion of mockery”.⁵⁷ We see how persistently he passes derogatory comments by using colonial discourse as an intellectual weapon against his ethnic others. It is this western cultural imperialism that preoccupies Eliade’s thinking throughout the novel. Whenever he talks about Indian women in general and about Devi in particular, a sense of estrangement prevails in his depiction of them. His declarations that she “was more vivacious, more human”, or “vain Bengali, odd, contemptuous of whites and yet drawn to them against her will” are the cases in point.⁵⁸ It is a bizarre sort of description that Eliade makes of Devi and about her appearances in the novel. He also admits: “I was fascinated by Maitreyi’s character, bewitched by the mystery that seemed to envelop her”.⁵⁹ All this is happening because of his failure to go beyond colonial mindset. All this is happening because of Eliade’s failure to go beyond colonial mindset and such remarks can also be taken as highlighting his misogynistic representation of women under the guise of seemingly embracing the orient/Devi, for “misogyny is primarily a property of individual misogynists who are prone to hate women, that is, because of their gender, either universally or at least very generally”.⁶⁰ I argue that Eliade’s misogynist attitude functions to enforce Devi’s subordination and to uphold his dominance on her throughout the novel. Viewed from orientalism along with misogyny, Devi’s representation exhibits double marginalization and Eliade’s control over her body and behavior in similar manners and this again amounts to misogyny which treats women as belonging to a subordinate class in the patriarchal societal construct.

Towards the end of the novel, we read that Eliade is informed by Mrs. Sen’s nephew that Devi has disgraced her family repute by secretly giving herself to a fruit seller and that “it would be better if she were dead” before committing such a disgraceful deed.⁶¹ Her illicit/animalistic act caused very hard blow to her family’s good name and almost made her mother mad with sorrows, because no one will be ready to take her in to wedlock after this fatal crime. Suffering from hysteria, Devi shouts at her parents and in schizophrenic manners asks them: “Why do you not give me to the dogs? Why do you not throw me on the street? I think she has gone mad. How else could she have done

⁵⁷ Eliade, *Bengal Nights*, 22.

⁵⁸ Eliade, 20-21.

⁵⁹ Eliade, 40

⁶⁰ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 18.

⁶¹ Eliade, 175.

such a thing?”⁶² We see Devi meeting the same fortune in Eliade’s novel that Bertha Mason met a century or so ago in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. Just like Bertha Mason, who represents “the woman from the colonies,” Devi also becomes mad.⁶³ If Mason set the house on fire and killed herself there Devi becomes wrathful against her own parents and meets almost the same destiny like Bertha. In the eyes of Spivak, Bertha’s function in *Jane Eyre* is to render uncertain the borderline between human and animal and therefore she reads this text “as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer”.⁶⁴

Conclusion

To conclude, drawn from the axiomatics of imperialism and orientalism in the novel, Indians in general and Devi in particular reduce the human/animal cutting-edge as reasonably uncertain. We have observed that the English/European women do stand par with the standardized visions of humanity. But as Indian women miserably fail to conform to the European version of humanness, they are not given the privileges that the white women are entitled with. It has been found that Eliade’s Orientalist gaze very generously distributes the awards such as brutes, primitives and treacherous to its ethnic others, be they men or women. This shows how the novel is filled with detestable remarks against the Orientals/Indians and their customs/rituals because of their falling out of the Europeans’ standards of civilization and culture. Hence, it can be asserted that it is a richly politicized colonialist text, which brings into limelight the writers’ orientalist ideology used to Othering the ‘other self’ in order to create the orient, the oriental and his world.

⁶² Eliade, 176.

⁶³ Spivak, *Critical Inquiry*, 251.

⁶⁴ Spivak, 247-251.

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