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IMPERIAL EYES AND NATIVE SHADOWS: A STUDY OF OTHERING IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *BURMESE DAYS*

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Abstract: George Orwell's Burmese Days (1934) offers a profound critique of British imperial rule in Burma, exposing how racial hierarchies and cultural prejudices legitimized colonial authority. This study applies Edward Said's (1978) concept of Othering to examine how the colonizers construct the Burmese as inferior and fundamentally different, thereby reinforcing imperial dominance. Through close textual analysis, the paper argues that Orwell simultaneously critiques and reflects orientalist ideologies, presenting a complex narrative of empire, race, and identity. The analysis further explores how systemic racism manifests in institutional spaces, such as the European Club, and in individual attitudes embodied by characters like Ellis and Elizabeth. Moreover, the protagonist Flory's moral conflict illustrates the psychological toll of colonial contradictions, while Dr. Veraswami's internalized racism reveals the cultural alienation of the colonized. By situating the novel within postcolonial discourse, this paper demonstrates how Burmese Days interrogates the ideological foundations of imperialism while exposing the fragility of its moral justifications.

Keywords: Racism, othering, imperial identity, colonialism, internalized racism, orientalism, colonial identity, cultural alienation, postcolonial literature.

Introduction

Racism is a deeply entrenched social construct that legitimizes inequality through assumptions of inherent superiority and inferiority among human groups. Scholars often define it as both an ideology and a system of practices that sustain social, political, and economic hierarchies (Smedley, 2022). Far from being a recent phenomenon, racism has existed for centuries, shaping interactions among communities, influencing cultural dynamics, and reinforcing structures of power. It manifests not only through overt discrimination but also through subtle cultural narratives that perpetuate stereotypes and exclusionary practices (Cared, 2022).

Colonialism intensified these divisions by institutionalizing racial hierarchies and legitimizing the exploitation of colonized populations (Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013). The British Empire, often described through the maxim "the sun never sets on the British Empire" (Misachi, 2018), constructed its authority on the premise of European cultural, intellectual, and moral superiority. Colonial narratives depicted the colonized as uncivilized, primitive, or childlike—figures in need of governance, discipline, and education from the colonizers. Such depictions served as ideological tools to justify imperial expansion, resource extraction, and political domination.

Postcolonial theorists argue that colonialism did not merely impose political and economic control but also reshaped the cultural imagination of both colonizers and the colonized (Said, 1978; Loomba, 2015). Said's seminal work, Orientalism, highlights the mechanism of Othering, wherein the colonized are constructed as the cultural and moral antithesis of the colonizers. Through this

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binary, the West positioned itself as rational, progressive, and superior, while portraying the East as irrational, stagnant, and inferior. Loomba (2015) further emphasizes that this ideological division extended beyond material domination, shaping literature, language, and social institutions to reinforce colonial worldviews.

Materials and Methods:

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis method.

- Primary source: George Orwell's Burmese Days (2021 edition, Global Grey Ebooks).
- Theoretical framework: Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) for the concept of Othering, with additional postcolonial insights from Loomba (2015), Memmi, and contemporary anti-racism literature (Cared, 2022; FutureLearn, 2022).

Procedure:

Passages depicting racial hierarchies, individual prejudice, institutional exclusion, and internalized racism were closely read. Characters (Ellis, Elizabeth, Flory, Dr. Veraswami) and settings (especially the European Club) were analyzed to identify patterns of Othering at the individual, systemic, and psychological levels.

This framework enables the paper to treat Burmese Days as both a critique of imperialism and a text shaped by its colonial context.

Racism: A product of colonialism with reference to *Burmese Days*:

Colonialism operates not only as a political and economic system but also as a cultural mechanism that produces identities through dichotomous constructions of self and other. Edward Said's (1978) concept of Othering describes how Western discourse frames the Orient—encompassing Asia, the Middle East, and other colonized regions—as an exotic, inferior, and threatening counterpart to the rational, civilized West. This binary, according to Said, legitimized imperial expansion by presenting colonized peoples as incapable of self-governance and in need of Western guidance.

Loomba (2015) extends this notion by emphasizing that colonial ideologies permeated literature, education, and everyday practices, naturalizing the belief that Europeans possessed inherent superiority. The colonized, in turn, were represented as barbaric, ignorant, or morally corrupt stereotypes that justified their subjugation. These perceptions were not merely abstract; they shaped material realities, from legal restrictions to social exclusion, as vividly illustrated in Orwell's Burmese Days. The novel presents Othering as both a discursive and structural phenomenon, manifesting in institutional practices such as the European Club's racial exclusivity and in interpersonal dynamics marked by derision and contempt.

While Othering provides the ideological foundation of colonial dominance, racism manifests at multiple levels—individual, systemic, and internalized—each reinforcing the colonial hierarchy.

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Individual Racism:

Individual racism refers to overt expressions of prejudice by individuals through speech, behaviour, or attitudes (Cared, 2022). In Burmese Days, Ellis epitomizes this form by repeatedly demeaning the Burmese with derogatory language, calling them "damned, dirty little niggers" (Orwell, 2021, p. 147). Elizabeth, though less openly abusive, reflects subtle individual racism through her disdain for Burmese customs and discomfort among the local populace, associating civility exclusively with European standards.

Systemic Racism:

Systemic racism occurs when discriminatory practices are embedded in institutions, laws, and social structures (FutureLearn, 2022). The European Club is emblematic of systemic racism, operating as what Orwell describes as the "spiritual citadel, the real seat of British power" (Orwell, 2021, p. 8), yet remaining closed to all "Orientals" regardless of merit. This exclusion mirrors the broader colonial policy of maintaining rigid racial boundaries to preserve European superiority.

Internalized Racism:

Internalized racism, a more insidious form, emerges when members of marginalized groups accept the prejudiced views imposed upon them (Smedley, 2022). Dr. Veraswami exemplifies this dynamic through his admiration of the British and his yearning for acceptance within their exclusive circles. His belief that colonial authority represents progress underscores the psychological impact of imperial ideology, which compels the colonized to measure their worth against European norms.

Through these forms of racism, Burmese Days portrays colonial Burma as a society where Othering is institutionalized, normalizing social exclusion and moral contradictions. The theoretical framework thus positions the novel as a complex critique of imperialism, revealing not only the injustices of colonial rule but also the ideological entanglements that sustain it.

Orwell's Burmese Days offers a layered depiction of British colonialism, exposing how racial hierarchies permeate personal relationships, institutional spaces, and cultural perceptions. The European Club symbolizes institutionalized exclusion, functioning as a metaphor for the colonial system itself. Described as "the spiritual citadel, the real seat of British power" (Orwell, 2021, p. 8), it stands as a fortress of privilege, reinforcing the social boundary between colonizers and the colonized.

Ellis embodies overt individual racism, his frequent use of racial slurs reflecting a mindset steeped in colonial arrogance. His assertion, "I don't like niggers, to put it in one word" (Orwell, 2021, p. 15), signals a disdain that extends beyond personal bias; it legitimizes systemic practices of exclusion. Similarly, Elizabeth demonstrates subtler prejudice, associating refinement and safety exclusively with white society and expressing disgust toward Burmese customs (Orwell, 2021, p. 69). Dr. Veraswami represents internalized racism. Despite his education and professional status, he measures his worth through European approval, stating, "If only I were a member of your European Club! If only!" (Orwell, 2021, p.

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25). His reverence for British governance, infrastructure, and medicine underscores the extent to which colonial ideology shapes his worldview, leading him to overlook the exploitative nature of imperial rule.

Flory, the novel's conflicted protagonist, embodies the moral and psychological contradictions of colonial life. Unlike Ellis or Elizabeth, Flory expresses deep admiration for Burmese culture and recognizes the exploitative nature of British rule. Yet his critique remains largely intellectual; he lacks the courage to challenge colonial structures beyond personal sympathy. His attachment to the Burmese is contrasted with his longing for companionship with Elizabeth, whose values reflect the very prejudices he despises (Orwell, 2021, p. 69).

This tension culminates in Flory's tragic demise, symbolizing the futility of resisting imperial ideology while remaining complicit within its framework. His inability to reconcile personal integrity with colonial expectations illustrates Orwell's broader critique: that empire dehumanizes not only the colonized but also the colonizers who question its legitimacy. The narrative simultaneously condemns and perpetuates orientalist assumptions, revealing Orwell's ambivalence as both critic and participant in imperial discourse.

Orwell's narrative often critiques the racism embedded in colonial Burma while reproducing orientalist stereotypes, revealing his ambivalence toward imperial ideology. Characters such as U Po Kyin are portrayed with exaggerated cunning, reinforcing colonial caricatures of the "corrupt native," while Veraswami is idealized for his loyalty to the British. These representations suggest that while Orwell condemns colonial injustice, he remains influenced by the racial hierarchies he seeks to expose.

Othering shapes every major character arc. For Ellis and Elizabeth, it affirms a sense of superiority and social security; for Veraswami, it fuels aspirations for acceptance; for Flory, it generates alienation and guilt. The European Club functions as a physical and symbolic space where these dynamics converge, underscoring how colonialism enforces rigid boundaries between self and other while fostering psychological and cultural conflict.

The Process of Othering with reference to *Burmese Days:*

Burmese Days is a realistic portrayal of British colonial rule in Burma. Orwell himself states, 'I dare say it's unfair in some ways and inaccurate in some details, but much of it is simply reporting what I have seen.' This very statement proves that the novel is the first-hand experience of the novelist himself. Being a member of the Burmese Imperial Police from 1922 to 1927, Orwell witnessed the attitude of the white men towards the natives. After his service, he made a victorious attempt to pour his experiences out which ultimately resulted into *Burmese Days.* Emma Larkin, in her Introduction to *Burmese Days*, states *Burmese Days* has been for me a heady blend of fact and fiction. This novel illustrates Orwell's condemnation for the vicious and wicked coloniser who colonised Burma for some years.

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The European Club, in this novel, is the evergreen and overflowing source of racism which stands as the representative of white men's racial tendencies and injustice towards the natives. As the club is "the real centre of the town" (Orwell, 8), it simultaneously becomes the centre of the novel because the on goings inside the Club build up a series of problems. Orwell portrays it as "the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power."(Orwell, 8) As its name signifies, this club is exclusive for the white people and it had never admitted an Oriental to membership and this is one of the root causes of most of the misfortunes that one comes across while going through this novel. The narration becomes intense when Dr. Veraswami's innermost desire is revealed that is to have the membership of the Club but the problem emerges from the fact that the doctor is one of the natives, the Others and "…because of his black skin, could not be received in the Club." (Orwell, 25) In addition, his conversation with Flory also reveals the hardships that the natives have to encounter in having access to the membership. The sense of superiority of the white men and the inferiority of the 'Others' are firmly grounded in the minds of the natives by the Europeans and that is the reason why Dr. Veraswami feels uneasiness in front of Flory before asking for the aid so that he can become one of the respected and honourable members of the European Club. He hesitates, "It iss, if only- ah, my friend, you will laugh at me, I fear. But it iss this: if only I were a member of your European Club! If only! How different would my position be!" (Orwell, 25) His uneasiness is the reflection of the bitter fact that how it is really strenuous and backbreaking for the native to make himself/herself equal to the Europeans. After pondering over for a while, Flory comforts him by promising to propose his name in the election.

Orwell presents how the white men despise the natives and exposes the mean-mindedness of the Europeans, their arrogance and disrespect for the natives. Through the character of Ellis, the novelist has canvassed the racial tendencies of the Europeans. Ellis views the natives as "damned, dirty little niggers" (Orwell, 147), "sneaking, mangy little rats!"(Orwell, 147) When Ellis comes to know about the notice of admitting the native in the club, he remarks, "I'll die in the ditch before I'll see a nigger in here."(Orwell, 11) Ellis is dead against the proposal of rendering the privilege to the natives to be the member of their European Club because he feels that it is the place where they can have time to relax themselves and moreover, he doesn't like their discussion or their conversation to be divulged to any of the natives. He asserts, "this Club is a place where we come to enjoy ourselves, and we don't want natives poking about in here. We like to think there's still one place where we're free of them." (Orwell, 15) Ellis doesn't have even a least amount of respect for the niggers and calls them "black, stinking swine." (Orwell, 11) The interesting aspect of his personality is that he can rarely open his mouth without intention of insulting and abusing them. He states, "I don't like niggers, to put it in one word." (Orwell, 15) He execrates them "with a bitter, restless loathing as of something evil or unclean." (Orwell, 12) He can't stand

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any friendly relationship between 'us and them' and that's why he gets angry with Flory, shouting-"even if that pot-bellied greasy little sod of a nigger doctor *is* your best pal. *I* don't care if you choose to pal up with the scum of the bazaar. If it pleases you to go to Veraswami's house and drink whisky with all his nigger pals, that's your look-out. Do what you like outside the Club. But, by God, it's a different matter when you talk of bringing niggers in here. I suppose you'd like little Veraswami for a Club member, eh? Chipping into our conversation and pawing everyone with his sweaty hands and breathing his filthy garlic breath in our faces. By God, he'd go out with my boot behind him if I ever saw his black snout inside that door. Greasy, potbellied little -! etc." (Orwell, 11)

Ellis is the staunch white man who feels that they are there to rule the country and not to treat them in a decent way. He asserts, "Here we are, supposed to be governing a set of damn black swine who've been slaves since the beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the only way they understand, we go and treat them as equals." (Orwell, 12) Hardly there is any line, spoken by Ellis, which does not reveal his racial beliefs. When Flory proposes the name of one of the natives and his best companion Dr. Veraswami in the election for the membership of the Club, Ellis loses his temper and abuses him, "You oily swine! You nigger's Nancy boy! You crawling, sneaking - bloody bastard!" (Orwell, 142) There prevails a high sense of superiority among the Europeans and to include the Others in the Self is a fatal threat to their superiority. Ellis, through his utterances, expresses the prevalent racist British belief that the white men are superior to the indigenous people and that the Indians should not be welcomed at the English Club in India. They further should be excluded from the white circles. Thus, they should know their places and boundaries and remain as the 'Others.' Dr. Veraswami's mind is firmly rooted with the notions of superiority and inferiority. He has a strong and unshakable belief that the European race is superior to the barbaric, uncivilised and uneducated natives. The white men are superior in every respect. It seems that Veraswami has accepted the fact of the natives being inferior. He feels blessed to have a European friend and thinks of it as a kind of honour whenever his European friend pays him a visit. He exhilarates, "Prestige, Mr. Flory, iss like a barometer. Every time you are seen to enter my house the mercury rises half a degree." (Orwell, 26) It is worth to mention that the British colonization of Burma has created racial boundaries meant to ensure that the British colonizers have the upper hand and superiority over the colonized natives, a policy which is meant to consolidate their colonial rule in Burma. In this novel, one finds the society divided into two- upper class and lower class. Racial boundaries divide people and make them struggle hard to prove their own worth and value and that is seen through the desperate struggles of Dr. Veraswami and U Po Kyin to join the European Club as native members because both are ambivalent in nature.

There comes an interesting turn when U Po Kyin, in order to implicitly degrade Dr. Veraswami, writes several anonymous letters which can cause harm to the dignity of white

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men, particularly of Mr. Macgregor. As U Po Kyin is the great schemer, his plan works out without a hitch and everyone is made to believe that the letters have been written by Dr. Veraswami. Ellis seizes this opportunity and posted a notice regarding the postponement of the idea of admitting any nigger in the Club. Ellis is over the moon and exclaimed with joy and a sense of triumph, "That'll give little fat-belly something to think about, eh? Teach the little sod what we think of him. That's the way to put 'em in their place, eh?" (Orwell 35) Within this context, Albert Memmi writes that the colonized cannot rise above his social status and be permitted to assimilate since all efforts of the colonialist are directed towards maintaining the social immobility, and racism is, the surest weapon for the aim. Same is the case with this narration also as Dr. Veraswami tries his best to rise himself but Ellis always comes as a dead-stroke of hammer to put him back again in his place.

Being the British coloniser, Ellis is familiar with all the power and authority over the colonised to do with them whatever he wants without being afraid of any police inquiry as there is a sort of rule that the colonisers are free from suspicions. He takes the evil advantage of his authority and mistreats the natives. The human rights and privileges are exclusive for the colonisers as the Burmese people are viewed as inferior and savages without a dignified life of their own. The racial tendencies and prejudices of the whites make the Indians scapegoats in the poisonous or murderous hands of the colonisers. In *Burmese Days*, one such event is narrated where a British officer named Maxwell is murdered. Though they didn't have sufficient and authentic evidences, a native was accused of being his murderer. After this incident, Ellis makes a native boy go blind by harming him. It was the last straw. Before that, the Indians had no vision to perceive the evils, injustice and corruption of the British. These events lead the natives to revolt against them. Some of the natives gather in front of the Club and demand for the fair justice. They want to punish Ellis in their own way for his wickedness towards the boy who has lost his eyesight. They ask them to deliver Ellit, as they pronounce, to them because, as they say, "We know that there is no justice for us in your courts, so we must punish Ellit ourselves." (Orwell, 149) It seems that the racism and arrogance of Ellis permits him to cause such harm to the native as he knows that everything is going to be managed and his actions will go unpunished. Ironically, in their own homeland, Indians are judged with the English laws and consequently, the Indians are deprived of their human rights and justice.

The character of Elizabeth can be placed under the category of what is called individual racism. Individual racism refers to an individual racist assumptions, beliefs or behaviours and is a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious or unconscious, personal prejudice. As the novel develops, one meets the leading female character who is She-Ellis as she utterly despises a mere sight of any natives. She is Elizabeth who is outwardly beautiful, "chalk-faced" (Orwell, 65) and innocent but ultimately ends up being "a burra memsahib."(Orwell, 174) Although she is a shallow person in the

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novel, she is a developed character with dialogues and multiple points of view. If her character were to be placed in England rather than Burma, she probably would not be considered an interesting character. She has a kind of belief that the virtues like beauty, decency and civility are associated with the white people only. However, she herself, despite being European, is incapable of showing any kind of esteem for the natives. In her eyes, the natives and the nation are "revoltingly ugly', dreadful" (Orwell, 69) and "horribly dirty." (Orwell, 74) A few years ago, when her uncle was rich, she was sent to a very expensive boarding- school for two terms. It was an expensive school where nearly all of them has ponies and allowed to be ride along at Saturday. Although she experienced a short period in school, it brought a great change of her character and her belief about life. She believes, "the Good ('lovely' was her name for it) is synonymous with the expensive, the elegant, the aristocratic; and the Bad ('beastly') is the cheap, the low, the shabby, the laborious." (Orwell, 51)

Flory has a soft corner for this delicate creature but cannot gather enough courage to express his heart-felt emotions for her and at last when he hardly manages to do so, it was too late. Both of them stand in a sharp contrast as rarely there is something on which they hold the same opinion. Similar to Ellis, she also can't stand the presence of the black-faced men. When Flory asks her to come to watch *pwe* which was being acted in the market, she initially hesitates as to her "it did not seem right or even safe to go in among that smelly native crowd." (Orwell, 59) While watching the dance, her racial beliefs suddenly come to surface and she is filled with terror. She is uncomfortable of remaining present among the natives with the scent of their garlic and their sweat. She realizes that she is not supposed to be there watching the savage spectacle. She considers, "Surely it was not right to be sitting among the black people like this, almost touching them, in the scent of their garlic and their sweat? Why was she not back at the Club with the other white people? Why had he brought her here, among this horde of natives, to watch this hideous and savage spectacles?" (Orwell, 61) She is too suffocated to tolerate the bazaar-scene. She suffers from a great amount of discomfort among the black faces as for her; they are "the savages whose appearance still made her shudder!" (Orwell, 69) For her, the Club is not only a social place but a psychological refuge from the natives who are described as hordes of black animals. She wants to be with her own place where only she feels safe and secure and that is European Club.

Elizabeth has come from England to Burma with negative preconceived notions about the 'Others' without really knowing or contacting them. It seems that she has a set of beliefs, prejudices against the natives which never allow her to nurture friendly relationship with the natives. On the other hand, Flory never gets tired of admiring the Burmese culture and their behaviour which gradually widens the rift between them that becomes unbridgeable towards the end. Flory's love and devotion to the Burmese people is one of the causes that brings catastrophic end to his relationship with Elizabeth. Both of them are white people, yet

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their nature, beliefs, behaviour, way of thinking, likes and dislikes stand in the sharp contradiction. She only judges the natives from their physical appearance and sometimes her opinion does not make sense. It is evident when Flory describes the Burmese people as "charming looking" (Orwell, 69) who have "splendid bodies." (Orwell, 69)

"But they have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat's. And then the way their foreheads slant back-it makes them look so *wicked.* I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people's heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a *criminal type*." (Orwell, 69)

The European Club is another instance about which both of them hold different opinions. Elizabeth views it as the sole place in entire Burma where she can feel home among so-called civilised and hypocrite white people. She adores "the civilised atmosphere of the Club, with the white faces all around her and the friendly look of the illustrated papers and the "Bonzo" pictures." (Orwell, 64) However, when it comes to Flory, one can clearly find the striking difference. Flory despises that place from the bottom of his heart which is evident in his conversation with Dr. Veraswami. Flory expresses "what a joy to be here after that bloody Club. When I come to your house I feel like a Nonconformist minister dodging up to town and going home with a tart. Such a glorious holiday from *them"* (Orwell, 19) Flory can't stand their insults, indifference and abusive words for the Burmese people. He is the only one among almost all the British who is not as hypocrite as them. For him, it is "a relief to be out of the stink of it for a little while." (Orwell, 20) At one point, Flory presents his opinion regarding the beauty of Burmese women but as usual Elizabeth opposes his views, being shocked at the remark of Flory which again makes her a worth studying racist character. She argues with him and asks, "Aren't they too simply dreadful? So *coarse*-looking; like some kind of animal. Do you think *anyone* could think those women attractive?" (Orwell, 69) It is difficult for her to bear the black skinned people.

Orwell narrates one event which richly defines Elizabeth as a racist personality. Li Yeik is a Chinese grocer and a friend of Flory who runs a shop. Elizabeth is hesitant to go with Flory inside the shop as she does not want to experience anything more horrible after witnessing "the barbarity of the bazaar." (Orwell, 75) However, she sets foot in the shop only because of "the European look of Li Yeik's shopfront" (Orwell, 75) She beholds the sight of two Chinese women and observes "their feet, with bulging, swollen insteps, were crammed into red-heeled wooden slippers no bigger than a doll's." (Orwell, 76) Flory expresses his view that as per the ideas of Chinese people, such small feet are "beautiful." (Orwell, 76) At this, she blurts out shockingly, "beautiful! They are so horrible I can hardly look at them. These people must be absolute savages!" (Orwell, 76) Flory argues that the beauty is a matter of taste; everyone has different opinion about the beauty. He informs, "they're highly civilised; more civilised than we are, in my opinion. Beauty's all a matter of taste" (Orwell, 76) Elizabeth cannot accept the natives' hospitality. She

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feels very foolish when the natives fan her back and prepare the tea for her. She comments negatively, "this tea looks absolutely beastly. It's quite green." (Orwell, 77) However, Flory, as usual, defends by saying, "It's not bad. It's a special kind of tea old Li Yeik gets from China. It has orange blossoms in it, I believe." (Orwell, 77) After some moments, a naked child draws close towards her in order to examine her shoes and stockings. The child feels surrounded by white faces and "was seized with terror. It let out a desolate wail, and began making water on the floor." (Orwell, 78) Elizabeth loses her temper and is completely taken aback by such an awful incident. She can't help being shocked, exclaiming "If *that's* what you call civilised people-!" (Orwell, 78) For the natives, this incident is too normal to pay heed but for white people like Elizabeth, such things are hard to be accepted. She doesn't stay a moment anymore and immediately leaves the place without even having the courtesy of thanking them for offering the tea. She runs out of the shop with the impression of their being "absolutely *disgusting* people!" (Orwell, 78)

The novelist has displayed the distaste for mixed-race people and preferences for 'pure blooded' Europeans. The Eurasians are called half-breeds as they are "sons of white fathers and native mothers." (Orwell, 71) When Elizabeth comes to be informed about them, she states, "They looked awfully degenerate types, didn't they? So thin and weeding and cringing; and they haven't got at all *honest* faces. I suppose these Eurasians *are* very degenerate? I've heard that half-castes always inherit what's worst in both races. Is that true?" (Orwell, 72) Scholar and author Michelle Aung Than states that the authenticity of mixed races in early colonial discourse is rarely acknowledged in the literature. She further asserts that mixed races are spoken about or described the same way artefacts are described in a museum. Than suggests that half race can't be completely binary of self for a reason that the skin is a literal and figurative representation of self so limitations of belonging or not belonging have to do with how white one is by one's genetic purity. In the novel, the British think of Anglo-Burmese to be impure as they have the blood of the 'Others.' The way in which the Europeans perceive them and the use of nicknames for them promote racism in the novel.

The natives are viewed as the natives only through the racial lenses of Elizabeth. Therefore, Flory and Elizabeth fail to make a perfect couple. She doesn't expect him to admire the native to a great extent. She is incapable to genuinely love someone. In fact, she is difficult to be loved by a person like Flory. She always feels that he is attempting to control her way of living and thinking. She considers, "And the things he said, or the way he said them, provokes in her a vague yet deep disagreement. For she perceived that Flory, when he spoke of the 'natives', spoke nearly always *in favour* of them. He was forever praising Burmese customs and the Burmese character; he even went so far as to contrast them favourably with the English" (Orwell,69) For her, "natives were natives-interesting, no doubt, but finally only a "subject" people, an inferior people with black faces." (Orwell, 69) She eyes them with "incurious eyes of a

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memsahib!" (Orwell, 69) When she comes to know that Flory has kept a Burmese mistress, she finds herself dumbfounded and turns her heart towards Verrall who is young and handsome white man, lacking all courtesies. After staying in the town for a month, he leaves without informing anyone. After his departure, Elizabeth returns to Flory without shame. To her surprise, Flory accepts her but U Po Kyin and Ma Hla May destroys the apparent love between them which leads Flory to commit suicide.

There is a term called internalized racism. It is a disturbing concept. It occurs when the racial or ethnic group being discriminated against begins to accept society's racist attitude and beliefs. To put differently, the so-called 'inferiority' of one's own ethnic or racial group is believed. For example, internalized racism occurs when an indigenous person believes that indigenous people are naturally less intelligent than non-indigenous people. It is a consequence of colonialism. It is a kind of belief of a particular person in which he/she disregards his/her own culture and the white-skinned people are ranked above. Such internalized racists begin to find the positive aspects and negative aspects of the whites and their own culture respectively. In *Burmese Days*, one such character is delineated who represents this kind of racism and that is Dr. Veraswami. Despite being Indian, he abominates his own culture and admires the British culture. It is interesting to mention that his only British friend Flory has a strong likeness for the Burmese people and that's why he has the anti-British beliefs and perceives the world from anti-British angle. On the contrary, Dr. Veraswami is, from head to toe, painted with the British colours. The sharp contradiction between these two close companions makes the study interesting. They hardly share a common ground as both of them have contradictory outlook regarding all the subjects. As Orwell narrates "It was topsy-turvy affair, for the Englishman was bitterly anti-English and the Indian fanatically loyal." (Orwell, 21) His conversation with Flory is more than enough to mark him as an internalised racist. He thinks that it is a kind of honour to be in touch with Europeans. He imagines, "Ah but, my friend, how gratifying to me if I should become a member of your European Club! What an honour, to be the associate of European gentlemen!" (Orwell, 90) Just as Flory cannot hear even a single word against the Burmese people, Dr. Veraswami also can't stand any criticism regarding the British. When Flory expresses his anti-English beliefs, he at once takes the stand of the whites, expressing grief as Flory neither shows any regard nor admires the achievements of the whites. He sticks to his negative remarks for the British so Veraswami argues-

"But truly, truly, Mr. Flory, you must not speak so! Why is it that always you are abusing the pukka sahibs, ass you call them? They are the salt of the earth. Consider the great things they have done- consider the great administrators who have made British India what it iss. Consider Clive, Warren Hastings, Dalhousie, Curzon. They were such men-I quote your immortal Shakespeare-ass, take them for all in all, we shall not look upon their like again!"(Orwell, 20) "And consider how noble a type iss the English gentleman! Their

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glorious loyalty to one another! The public school spirit! Even those of them whose manner iss unfortunate-some Englishmen are arrogant, I concede-have the great, sterling qualities that we Orients lack. Beneath their rough exterior, their hearts are of gold." (Orwell, 20)

Dr. Veraswami has a firm belief that without the assistance of the whites, the natives are unable to develop themselves and their country. Had the British not been here, the natives could not have made their nation prosperous. He believes that the natives have become educated, skilled and civilised with the efforts of the Europeans. He admires the machinery, ships, railways, roads, the way they protect the forests, the system of prisons, and the so on. He worships them for conquering plague, cholera, leprosy, small pox, venereal disease. All the luxuries and facilities have been gifted to the natives by them. When Flory resorts to his anti-British belief, Veraswami argues-

"Could the Burmese trade for themselves? Can they make machinery, ships, railways, roads? They are helpless without you. What would happen to the Burmese forests if the English were not here? They would be sold immediately to the Japanese, who would gut them and ruin them. Instead of which, in your hands, actually they are improved. And while your businessmen develop the resources of our country, your officials are civilising us, elevating us to their level, from pure public spirit. It iss a magnificent record of self-sacrifice." (Orwell, 21) "Consider Burma in the days of Thibaw, with dirt and torture and ignorance, and then look around you. Look merely out of this veranda-look at that hospital, and over to the right at that school and that police station. Look at the whole uprush of modern progress!" (Orwell, 22) "Gramophones, billycock hats, the News of the World-all iss better than the horrible sloth of the Oriental. I see the British, even the least inspired of them, ass-ass-ass the torchbearers upon the path of progress." (Orwell, 22)

Orwell demeans non-Europeans and praises the contribution of the British in the colonies. His condemnation for his own country and own culture put him under the category of internalised racist. His contempt and beliefs for the nation and people are revealed when he expresses his views to Flory, saying "how discouraging iss the work of doctor in this country! These villegers-dirty, ignorant savages! Even to get them to come to hospital iss all we can do, and they will die of gangrene or carry a tumour ass large ass a melon for ten years rather than face the knife. And such medicines ass their own so-called doctors give to them! Herbs gathered under the new moon, tigers' whiskers, rhinoceros horn, urine, menstrual blood! How men can drink such compounds iss disgusting." (Orwell, 87) He is more concerned about his prestige declaring, "Prestige iss all." (Orwell, 89) He is worried about his reputation because he is aware of every possible danger from U Po Kyin who also has an intense desire for becoming the member of European Club. As he is one of the most powerful men, he can cause any harm to anyone that one can't even think of. In his conversation with Flory, one comes across the problems which the natives have to face under the British colonial rule. It happens when U Po

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Kyin was plotting against him, accusing him of giving rise to rebellion which was actually risen by U Po Kyin himself. Veraswami fears, "There iss nothing I can do. Simply I must wait and hope that my prestige will carry me through. In affairs like this, where a native official's reputation iss at stake, there iss no question of proof, of evidence. All depends upon one's standing with the Europeans." (Orwell, 89)

The author also mocks how Veraswami talks like a snake and uses "iss" instead of "is," and gives the doctor animalistic attributes. The novelist does not criticize his behaviour. The author goes too far in explaining how non-Europeans beg to be considered equals to Europeans, and Orwell confirms the superiority of Englishmen to the natives. However, Flory is not even a least moved by such temptations. He remains firm in what he believes as he knows that it is just a pretext that the Britishers have come to this country for their upliftment. Flory remarks, "Why, of course, the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them." (Orwell, 21) The problem is that Dr. Veraswami's eyes have been folded who is now unable to perceive the existing reality. He, with a heavy heart, sighs "My friend, it iss pathetic to me to hear you talk so. It iss truly pathetic." (Orwell, 21) Flory attempts to make his friend aware of the naked realities that are hidden behind the white masks. He reveals that they have not been teaching anything to any youngsters otherwise there is a fear of future competition between both of the group. The natives have been tempted to have liquors. He adds that the British are the responsible for crushing various industries. He asserts, "We teach the young men to drink whisky and play football. I admit, but precious little else. Look at our schools-factories for cheap clerks. We've never taught a single useful manual trade to the Indians. We daren't; frightened of the competition in industry. We've even crushed various industries." (Orwell, 21) To cease the flow of Flory's remarks, Veraswami retorts, "My friend, my friend, you are forgetting the Oriental character. How iss it possible to have developed us, with our apathy and superstition? At least you have brought us to law and order. The unswerving British Justice and Pax Britannica." (Orwell, 22) Veraswami seems to be too blind to see the realities presented by his own friend. It seems that Flory is the mouth piece of the novelist through whom Orwell is presenting the hidden motives of the British.

Simultaneously, his dialogues reveal some benefits of being a white man or a member of the European Club. If a person is one of the Europeans, he/she is never suspected of doing any wrong, though he/she may have done something. It occurs when Flory comes as Veraswami's protecting shield to safeguard him from the evil plans of U Po Kyin and assures him of proposing his name in the election. Veraswami warns him that U Po Kyin can cause harm to him also that is to Flory also by involving his name in some illegal activities. At this point, Flory confides, "no one would believe anything against *me*. Civis Romanus sum. I'm an Englishman-quite above suspicion." (Orwell, 26) Being the white man, Flory is too shielded to have any problem from anyone but Veraswami is aware of his

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nationality and of the crook minded U Po Kyin's power. U Po Kyin has prepared several anonymous anti-British letters and for that Veraswami has been suspected. Additionally, he has spread a number of rumours about Veraswami. He is charged with everything he can't even think of even in the worst dream. As it is narrated, "The doctor was charged not only with sedition, but also with extortion, rape, torture, performing illegal operations, performing operations while blind drunk, murder by poison, murder by sympathetic magic, eating beef, selling death certificates to murderers, wearing his shoes in the precincts of the pagoda and making homosexual attempts on the Military Police drummer boy." (Orwell, 80) Veraswami is well aware of the fact that though he keeps his nose to grindstone, no one will ever trust him as he is neither white man nor a member of the European Club and such protection is exclusive for the Europeans only. This is one of the reasons behind his intense desire to be the member of the Club so he can become invulnerable. He wishes, "If I were elected to the Club! Ah, indeed, yes! The Club! It iss a fortress impregnable. Once there, and no one would listen to these tales about me any more than if it were about you, or Mr. Macgregor, or any other European gentleman. But what hope have I that they will elect me after their minds have been poisoned against me?" (Orwell, 89)

Burmese Days is a portrayal of the difficulties such as torture, injustice, insults, racism, violence that the natives have to endure under the British colonial rule. Though Veraswami is an admirer of the British culture and though he imitates the Englishmen, he is excluded from the white-men's circle. He feels displaced in his own country. Orwell's description of him is like a caricature and this may be taken as a critique of the indigenous people, who accept colonialism and who try to rise in the social-strata by co-operating with the British.

Conclusion

George Orwell's Burmese Days portrays British colonial Burma as a society sustained by racial hierarchies, cultural arrogance, and systemic exclusion. Through the European Club, Orwell symbolically depicts colonial power as both a physical and ideological fortress, safeguarding the privileges of the colonizers while marginalizing the colonized. Characters such as Ellis and Elizabeth exemplify overt and subtle forms of individual racism, whereas Dr. Veraswami reveals the psychological consequences of internalized prejudice. Flory's conflicted consciousness represents the moral dissonance of those who recognize imperial injustice yet remain ensnared by its structures.

While the novel critiques the exploitative nature of empire, it also reflects the biases of its time, occasionally perpetuating orientalist tropes. This duality underscores Orwell's ambivalent position as both critic and participant within the colonial enterprise. Yet, by dramatizing the human and ideological costs of imperialism, Burmese Days becomes a valuable literary site for examining Othering, identity, and the contradictions of empire.

This study situates Orwell's work within postcolonial discourse, arguing that the novel functions not only as a critique of British imperialism but also as an artifact of its

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cultural legacy. In doing so, it underscores the relevance of Burmese Days to ongoing discussions about race, power, and representation, illustrating how literature can expose—and sometimes replicate—the structures it seeks to challenge.

Results:

Analysis of Burmese Days reveals three key findings:

1. Institutionalized Exclusion:

The European Club operates as "the spiritual citadel, the real seat of British power" (Orwell, 2021, p. 8), excluding all "Orientals" regardless of merit. This exclusion mirrors broader colonial policies that maintained rigid racial boundaries.

2. Individual Racism:

Ellis epitomizes overt prejudice, calling the Burmese "damned, dirty little niggers" (Orwell, 2021, p. 147) and resisting any inclusion of natives in the Club. Elizabeth embodies subtler prejudice, associating civility with white society and expressing disgust at Burmese customs and appearances.

3. Internalized Racism:

Dr. Veraswami exemplifies internalized prejudice, admiring the British and yearning for Club membership as a marker of respectability. His belief in British superiority illustrates the psychological impact of imperial ideology.

Flory's ambivalent position highlights the contradictions of colonizers who recognize injustice yet remain complicit, culminating in his tragic end.

Discussion and Conclusion:

These findings confirm that Burmese Days dramatizes how racism operates on multiple levels—individual, systemic, and internalized—sustaining the colonial order. The European Club symbolizes not only physical exclusion but also ideological boundaries between colonizer and colonized.

While Orwell critiques colonial injustice through characters like Flory, he also perpetuates orientalist stereotypes, for instance in the portrayal of U Po Kyin as the scheming "corrupt native." This ambivalence reflects Orwell's position as both critic and participant in imperial discourse.

By situating Burmese Days within postcolonial theory, this study shows how the novel functions as both a critique and a product of its time. It underscores the enduring relevance of Orwell's text to discussions of race, power, and representation, illustrating how literature can simultaneously expose and replicate the structures it seeks to challenge.

George Orwell's Burmese Days (1934) vividly portrays these colonial dynamics through its narrative of British rule in Burma. Written from Orwell's own experiences as a member of the Indian Imperial Police (1922–1927), the novel exposes the racial prejudices, cultural arrogance, and social hierarchies that defined the colonial encounter (Larkin, 2021). The European Club, a central symbol in the text, reflects the institutional exclusion of the Burmese, while characters like Ellis and Elizabeth embody the overt and subtle forms of racism that sustain colonial power. Conversely, Flory, the conflicted protagonist, reveals the psychological dissonance of

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colonizers who recognize imperial injustice yet remain complicit within its framework.

This paper applies Edward Said's (1978) concept of Othering as its primary theoretical lens, supported by Loomba's (2015) interpretations of colonial discourse and Newman's (2019) definition of racism as "prejudice plus power." The study examines how Burmese Days simultaneously critiques and reproduces orientalist ideologies, revealing Orwell's ambivalence toward the colonial system he condemns. By focusing on racial hierarchies, internalized racism, and the politics of belonging, the paper explores how the novel illustrates the moral and cultural contradictions of empire.

Ultimately, the research aims to demonstrate that Burmese Days is not merely a critique of imperialism but a complex narrative that interrogates the ideological foundations of colonialism while reflecting its lingering biases. The study seeks to contribute to postcolonial literary scholarship by showing how Orwell's text operates as both a product of its time and a critique of the very system it depicts.

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