

RECREATING THE PAST CULTURE: IN JOHN MASTERS'S NOVEL "THE RAVI LANCERS."

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ABSTRACT

American critic Stephen Greenblatt who coined the term 'New Historicism'. It was the reading of literary and non-literary texts in the same historical period. The writers could perceive the facts of the past and depicts these facts from their own concepts to create history. John Masters also wrote with historical perspectives. The research paper is about recreating the past culture in John Masters's novel *The Ravi Lancers*. It attempts to study the socio-cultural perspectives and also the contemporary historical events which are the subjects of his novels. This research tries to produce a critical analysis of contemporary culture and dominant culture in society.

KEYWORDS: *New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Socio-Cultural Perspectives, Cultural Study and Dominant Culture*

INTRODUCTION

"History is textualised and texts are historicised". 'New historicism' was coined by American critic Stephen Greenblatt. The simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts usually of the same historical period. Its main aim is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re-situating it. John Masters also presents his novels in historical perspective.

Lieutenant colonel John Masters (1914-1983) was an English officer in the Indian Army and a Novelist. John Masters was also known for his historical novels set in India. His works were noted for their treatment of the British Empire in India. John Masters's novels are a reconstruction of the past from a present perspective and highlight the role of the present in remaking the past and making it more usable to the present.

The Ravi Lancers (1972) – The novel deals with an Indian regiment in World War I. This novel concerns on an Indian Regiment sent to the Western front in the First World War. It centers on the conflict developed between the regiments British Commander and Indian Commander. The Ravi Lancers was the private armies belongs to Indian princes, Krishna Ram. Warren Bateman was a new commanding officer for the Ravi Lances. Warren Bateman brought Krishna Ram and his lancers to the Western Front. Krishna Ram had an affair with Warren's sister Diana and Warren's wife with Ralph Harris. Warren Bateman became a tyrant to his men to dominate their traditions and religious customs with morals. Eventually Batmen shot dead himself. Krishna Ram still fought for England in France. Because of Krishna Ram word had given to Warren Bateman for support to England. In this novel John Masters presents reality of the society in a slice and crafts with his own imaginative faculty.

The research paper is recreating the past culture in John Masters's novel *The Ravi Lancers*. It attempts to study the socio-cultural perspectives and also the contemporary historical events which are the subjects of his novels. This research tries to produce a critical analysis of contemporary culture.

John Masters depicted the both cultures of British and India in the novel *The Ravi Lancers*. The capitalized people shaped the structures into Race, Religion, Caste, Prejudices of Culture and Customs. John Masters portrayed the food cultures of both countries. Native people used to eat chupattis. But British eat sandwiches, whisky etc. John Masters's interpretations are here to readers.

Warren dismounted. No cooks were accompanying the force so the men would be eating cold chupattis and dal from their mess tins. He himself would be eating the same, for when Colonel Hanbury had offered him mutton sandwiches he had decided to take the sowers' food instead. The Yuvraj came towards him, holding a bottle, 'Whisky, Captain Bateman?' Warren said, 'What about you?' 'I don't drink. I had my bodyguards bring it for you.' Warren took the bottle. 'Well, that's very thoughtful of you. Wouldn't Sher Singh and your uncle like a drop?' 'They have their own.' He sat down beside Warren on a dried tree trunk half-buried in the sand. 'Do you think we did that all right?' 'Very good,' Warren said. (*The Ravi Lancers*, 31)

British imposed the western culture upon the native people. They were forced to follow those cultures. John Masters brought out those dominant cultures in this novel. The Yuvraj was a native king of Ravi state. "The Yuvraj said quickly, 'We eat Indian style, but there is always European food for Colonel Hanbury.'" (38)

British liked the Indian culture. They preferred Indian food. And some other cultural people preferred Indian food too. John Masters narrated this culture through the character Warren.

Warren said, 'Unless your khansamah's a lot better than ours, I'd prefer Indian food. In any case, I accept with thanks.' 'Oh, good! Of course, we don't really have a mess when we are in Basohli, because nearly everyone is married and lives in his own house, with his family... like the Guards in England, Mr. Fleming told me... but on manoeuvres we have one, because my grandfather is very keen that we should be as much like a regular regiment as possible.' (38)

John masters explained the classical band in this novel

He whistled softly under his breath, for only one regiment of the regular Indian cavalry had a band. These Ravi people not only had a band, it was playing the European music very well...in front of the marquee, where the band was playing, for they were dressed in full dress of gold and white, their bandmaster wearing gold sash and gem-encrusted sabre... Corelli of the Brahmins came up alongside him and muttered, 'Good God, how on earth did they bring all this stuff out here?' (38-39)

British used to drink wine for the weather condition to adjust their body in India as well as England. India people used to have a drink called chota peg. This was the old product of India. John Masters represented the old custom in these lines. "What will you have?" the prince asked. 'Oh, a chota peg, please.' The prince passed on the order in Hindi to a waiting orderly, ordering a lemon and soda for himself." (39)

John masters reshaped the old custom of food culture of british people

While Colonel Hanbury and his guest ate through six European courses — soup, fish, entree, roast, sweet, and savoury — the rest were served with spicy tidbits of meat, egg, mountains of savoury rice, vegetables, curried chicken, and sweetmeats done up in silver foil. Sherry, white wine, red wine, champagne, port, madeira, and brandy followed each other in ritual procession. Some of the Ravi officers drank a great deal, some none at all. All ate with the fingers of their right hands, some gracefully and some coarsely. The band played European music on the grass outside. At one end of the marquee, behind the president's chair, a pair of lances were crossed over a large photograph of the Rajah of Ravi, garishly hand-coloured and ornately framed. In the wrinkled old face, under the jewelled turban ornament, Warren recognized features similar to Krishna Ram's — the same wide level eyes and hawk nose and firm chin.(40)

The pension system was followed in India. John Masters noted it here in this novel

Oh, wouldn't she get it anyway?' 'We have no pension system. They are awarded as the Rajah thinks fit. It's all rather kachcha, I know' — he spread his hands deprecatingly — 'but it's the old-fashioned way, and my grandfather won't have anything else (41)

John Masters renowned the British game cricket in these lines to readers to understand the local description of the game.

Krishna's goal was difficult, but worthwhile. There was a great opportunity for the State. There was a chance for glory, and for his grandfather's army to outstrip the armies of all other States in experience and efficiency. As for himself his thoughts wandered, to London, to tail-funnelled ships, to the ocean he had never seen, to Buckingham Palace and the King-Emperor, a cricket field intensely green, with huge gasometers at one end, just like Mr. Fleming had told him about, and men in Free Forester and I Zingari blazers, here and there a dark blue county cap. And the women, so pale, lovely, aloof (45-46)

John Masters tried to rebuilt history as well as culture of the past people. He gave local description about the Vishnu's feast, creator of the river and the kingdom. In this novel Krishna Ram depicted the culture of India people in this passage.

As he drove slowly into the heart of the city he heard the thud of drums and the wail of chanters and hillmen's pipes. The clash and clink of leg ornaments grew louder under the music, and he remembered that it was the Feast of Vishnu, the ancestor of his race, and the creator of the river and the kingdom. As a child he had loved those feasts and festivals, with the steady shake of drums all through the night, and the flash of women's bangles in the light of the oil lamps, and the red glow of fires reflected in the dancers' faces; but since growing up he had come to think them a little barbarous, surely a waste of the people's time and energy, as much as the fantastic sums a father had to spend on the marriage of a daughter — enough, often, to entail his land to the moneylenders for three generations. Surely his grandfather could do better things for the people than pay for all these musicians and tumblers and dancers and acrobats?(46)

John Masters offered the ancient art koothu or Therukoothu in which artists played songs with dance and music of the story telling. Krishna Ram wanted to meet his grandfather

He was about to drive the car round the edge of the square behind the mass of spectators, when he noticed that a great peacock feather fan was waving under the yellow awning that had been erected by the palace gates. (46)

Peacock feather referred to Lord Krishna's epic that is Mahabharata. When the koothu started the peacock feather would appear to the audience. People would know that koothu would started the Mahabharata. The artists would do make up such as great characters, Karnan, Lord Krishna, Durabathi etc. John Masters denoted it. "The three vertical red stripes of a follower of Vishnu were painted up his forehead, and his mouth, lips, and tongue were stained dark red with betel juice."(47)

John Masters compared the both culture in this novel. These lines are for the reader to rethink about the past culture.

The Mahabharata was his grandfather's favourite story — as indeed it was of most Indians — and when the tale was being recited or danced he would always be present. In fact, Krishna could have guessed it was a performance of the Mahabharata as soon as he saw the peacock feather fans. He squatted down beside the rajah, glad that the British officers he had been playing cricket with in Lahore could not see him now. The ability to squat, they seemed to think, was something an Indian was born with, but no Englishman could ever achieve. He turned his attention to the packed earth of the square, surrounded by a white and brown and red wall of people, which swayed to show that it was human.(47)

In India most of the girl children were murdered after new born babies. John Masters presented as the barbarism culture of India. Readers can understand this culture in these lines.

Among the Paharis girl children were put out naked on the ground for the first twenty-four hours of their life. Most died, leaving the few who survived to be the brides of the men. A girl born at this season, August, was more likely to live than one born in December, when a foot of snow covered the high pastures. More barbarism... indeed the British treated it as murder, where it was practised in British Indian territory, such as Bashahr.(49)

British used to eat beef, soup, sherry, wine etc. these food culture is focused in this novel.

The Roast Beef of Old England! They sat down to dinner and the sherry was passed. Soup and more sherry. The Merry Widow. Fish from Karachi, packed in ice, and sent up on the Sind Mail with white wine. Meat, tough lamb and roast potatoes, with champagne. Floradora. Dessert. More champagne. Savoury, angels on horseback, Port, sherry, madeira. (65)

Indian people followed the durbar means discoursing justice, taking decisions and so on. This was the one of the customs of Indian people. John Masters showed through these lines to the readers.

It remained to turn this collection of human material into a proud and war-worthy regiment of Indian cavalry. He pulled out his watch and saw that it only lacked quarter of an hour to durbar time. Durbar — an informal gathering of the regiment to air grievances and discuss whatever came into mind — was an old Indian Army custom. He was glad to see that the Ravi Lancers observed it.(75)

John Masters depicted durbar as a tool to spreading the British culture and custom with Indian culture and custom to the readers.

A durbar was a non-military gathering and normally everyone wore mufti. But, of course, they were on active service now, and no one had any plain clothes, except the suitcases which each officer was allowed to take in the baggage, full of civilian clothes and sports gear. It could not be helped, but he missed the comfortable sense of a family conference which plain clothes gave — the loose white shirts and wrinkled tight-fitting trousers, some men with flowers behind their ears, others wearing garlands round their necks. Some of the men here were wearing garlands, he saw, even though in uniform; also many wore tilaks, caste marks, painted on their foreheads — something which was not permitted in any regular regiment. But why not? There was no reason why a caste mark should have an adverse effect on a man's efficiency or courage — rather the reverse (75-76)

British people never eat with hands, but they used knife and fork instead of using hands. John Masters described this culture to the readers.

But yesterday, Brigadier-General 'Rainbow' Rogers, the senior officer on board, had seen Lieutenant Mahadeo, the ex-rissaldar, eating rice with his hand, and had told Colonel Hanbury to get his officers house-trained without delay. They were taking it very well, thanks mainly to Krishna Ram's attitude — all except Flaherty, the Anglo-Indian, who was staring with a surly mien at the empty plate before him, his head bowed. '... Take up knife and fork, like this... Notlike a dagger, IsharLall, more like a pencil... Try it, Flaherty.' 'I'm not a desi, sir,' the big man said sullenly. 'I know how to use knives and forks.' 'I'm sure you do,' Warren said, 'and so do other officers here. Now please join us in our little exercise (80)

John Masters rendered the panchayat system which was followed in the olden days.

Of course,' Krishna Ram said hastily. 'I am sure that works better... but the panchayat is what our people are used to, and it's very hard to make them change their attitudes. These things are in their minds, in their souls, sir, although they cannot easily speak about them — especially in English... It is a hard job to change such attitudes (86)

Indian people followed castism. They wanted to use caste marks. The old culture was brought out here in this novel.

General Rogers has ordered that caste marks may not be worn in uniform. As we are in uniform all the time on board, the men won't be able to wear tilaks at all.' Warren said, 'Well, there's an example for you, of what we were talking about. The general's taking another step to change the way you think. A caste mark seems quite normal to the men. To us... I don't mean myself, you understand, but to the European... it's a badge, announcing "I don't think the same as you (87)

Brahmin used to do prayer with a sacred fire, Indian people created the sacred fire to God. It was the culture called as fire worship. John Masters noted it here. "The sacred fire burned in a small charcoal stove in front of the Brahmin. Krishna Ram was seated, knees crossed, across the fire from the Brahmin." (88)

John Masters described about the sacred fire to the readers.

The Brahmin chanted for fifteen minutes, now and then rhythmically bowing over the sacred fire. Then a row of sowars on the other side of the fire struck up a hymn, accompanied by men beating hand drums with their palms, and the wail of a lone mountain pipe. The Brahmin started another long mumble. The deck trembled to the deep beat of the engines far below. The soot rained down inexorably from the black cloud. Two white faces appeared at the top of the companion

leading up from the main deck below, stared in astonishment, and disappeared (88)

John Masters defined the eastern music to the readers.

He hardly noticed the music at first because he had heard it so often from the lines of his regiment, or in the Lahore bazaars as he strolled about looking for a bargain, or in the evening at a nautch. It was a raga played expertly by sitar, dol, and drone. Glancing up he saw the Terrible Twins and Pahlwan Ram crowded round the gramophone listening to the record, which seemed to belong to the Twins: He listened appreciatively. He did not pretend to be an expert on Indian music, but Joan had taught him how to appreciate it, and this was a good tune, well played, with a very tricky beat. He let the book fall into his lap, leaned back, and closed his eyes. The music flowed over him like a river, as infinite in its rhythms (89)

British imposed so many western cultures upon the colonized people. In this novel British people forced Indians to adopt the western culture. It was the one of the examples was shown here.

After consideration, Krishna chose roast beef. Major Bateman raised an eyebrow, but Krishna said, 'The roast beef of Olde England is the best in the world, isn't it?' 'Yes. I was thinking that your grandfather might not approve.' 'I don't care,' Krishna said recklessly, 'I'm in England now... Europe... I have to live the European way. This is London, not Basohli.' He drank deeply from the fizzing, cold glass. Major Bateman smiled and said, 'Enjoy yourself. I won't sneak on you... But I'd be careful with that champagne, if I were you. It's stronger than it looks, or tastes (98)

After consideration British people never mind to kissing anybody. But Indian never does such things, because it was sins for them. John Masters described here "He bowed over her hand, wondering whether he ought to kiss it. Then Major Bateman was saying, 'My wife Joan. You didn't meet her in Lahore, did you?' 'No, sir. Only your sister, Miss Diana". (101)

Indian people believed the nature and adorn them as Gods. Cow was considered as Goddesses. They used to drink urine of cows and keep the cow dung as sacred things. John Masters defined it clearly to the readers.

As Krishna was taking off his pads he heard Warren Bateman say, 'Look what the children are playing with, Joan!' his voice sharp. Glancing up, Krishna saw that they were using cowpats as modelling clay. 'We mustn't stult their creative impulses,' Joan said firmly, 'there's nothing wrong with cow dung... Is there, Krishna?' Krishna blushed and cleared his throat. Personally he thought that cow dung was no different from horse dung or the dung of any other grass eater, but to the Brahmin it was sacred, like the cow itself; to most of the people of Ravi it was a principal fuel (105)

British people never control their children for choosing anything. But Indian controlled over their children till their marriage.

No Indian parent would tolerate the way those children were being brought up, permitted, as they were, to do anything they chose, except when their wishes ran afoul of their grandmother's. He had been interested to notice that it was the old lady's company, with all its prohibitions and orders, that they sought before anyone else's, including their mother's. (117)

British treated Indian people as uncivilized people. It described the orientalism of British people.

It was disgusting, disgraceful... un-English. But the fellow wasn't English. He was an Indian who'd been taught

to use a knife and fork. How could they beat the Huns with animals like that? But what — was — he — to — do?(159)

Indian women never drank the beer in the olden days. But British women used to drink beer. John Masters reconstructed the old custom to the readers.

Here we are,' she said. 'I'm ravenous. I hope you are, too, because really, the food's not very good.' It was the dining-room of an old-fashioned pub on the river front, and as they ate Diana gradually reverted to her old manner, as though slowly sloughing off the influence of the factory. Contrary to what he expected, as she drank sherry and then beer, she became calmer and less talkative (284)

Warren's sisters described the past culture in this novel to the readers.

I doubt it,' he said, smiling at her. Her eyes were warm and for a moment they looked at each other without saying a word. Then she took up her beer and said, 'Look at me drinking beer! I'd never done that until I came here.' 'You're changing,' he said, and knew that he meant not only her, or Warren Bateman her brother, but all England, all Europe. He wished suddenly that he could talk to Prince Ranjitsinhji and ask him whether he, who had known England well through cricket for twenty years, had noticed any change in the people's character and outlook since the war started.(284-285)

John Masters is recreating the past culture in novel *The Ravi Lancers*. It provided to study the socio-cultural perspectives and also the contemporary historical events. This research produced a critical analysis of contemporary culture.

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