
Psycho-Ethnic Conflict in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories

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Present will explore the psych-ethnic conflict in Katherine Mansfield's short stories. Rebelling against the restrictiveness and 'self fashioned chains of slavery' in New Zealand, Katherine Mansfield, a short story writer, diarist, fiction and letter writer, broke away from her British counterpart regarding the very notions of traditional views and the ideas of the 'prude' and 'propriety' ushering an new era of 'Modernity'. Being beckoned by the ideas and ways of modernity she even feels distanced and foreign in own 'homeland'. Thus her volunteer exilement from her homeland made her choose England as 'cultural and spiritual land'. Albeit, Mansfield was the 'colonial expatriate', her artistic excellence was formulated by her 'second world' origin and experiences made her aware of the cultural and racial differences between 'colonizer' and the 'colonized'. Mansfield's attitude towards New Zealand remained ambiguous throughout her life because she could neither embrace New Zealand nor she could shake off the earlier influences of her country what played a vital role in the development of her artistic vision.

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Rebelling against the restrictiveness and 'self fashioned chains of slavery' in New Zealand, Katherine Mansfield, a short story writer, diarist, fiction and letter writer, broke away from her British counterpart regarding the very notions of traditional views and the ideas of the 'prude' and 'propriety' ushering an new era of 'Modernity'. Being beckoned by the ideas and ways of modernity she even feels distanced and foreign in own 'homeland'. Thus her volunteer exilement from her homeland made her choose England as 'cultural and spiritual land'. Albeit, Mansfield was the 'colonial expatriate', her artistic excellence was formulated by her 'second world' origin and experiences made her aware of the cultural and racial differences between 'colonizer' and the 'colonized'. Mansfield's attitude towards New Zealand remained ambiguous throughout her life because she could neither embrace New Zealand nor she could shake off the earlier influences of her country what played a vital role in the development of her artistic vision. Her flight from New Zealand to England is marked by a drastic change in her attitude and perception. During her stay in England which was conspicuous for the free and bohemian lifestyle led her to confront ethnic and cultural differences. This confrontation had a severe impact on her deep psyche and she found herself a misfit, a stranger, an alien to her 'adopted homeland'.

Katherine Mansfield was a 'colonial modernist' not only because of her revolt against tradition but her story was exploratory by nature along with her links with the *avant garde* writers and artists like John Middleton Murry, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf. Like other Modernists of colonial province, Katherine Mansfield moulds her Modernist techniques from her colonial experiences and from her perspective as a colonial writer thinking herself to be 'inmates' within the colonial centre but in reality alienated to a great extent from 'metropolitan centre'. For Mansfield's articulation as a colonial outsider, what Homi Bhabha is of the opinion 'Difference within' i.e. for their encoding of the colonial otherness as engraved at time almost impressively or in a hidden ways ,yet tangible within the metropolis

and metropolitan self. Thus the reading of Katherine Mansfield both in the metropolitan centre and from the colonial periphery unfolds beforehand a response to the predicament of modernity i.e. the problem of self-alienation. At other hand colonialism, as a system and practice, produced especially in transnational and cross-cultural domains, contributes to the making modern perception and techniques based on the experiences, splitting of self, hallucination and 'self objectification'. Her in-betweenness is furthered by her gender, social class and choice of literary form and genre. She expressed the feeling of homelessness her colonial background produced in her writings. Her complex negotiation with the identity, her feeling of lost community difference, not belonging and desire to be rooted – all these issues fall under purview of Post Colonial literature which itself is a 'resistance' against the traditional 'Modern Literature'.

Mansfield's experience of geographical dislocation, cultural contradictions, sense of alienation, 'luminal in-betweenness' and her emotional response to these are preserved in the manuscript of her short stories and letters. Like her own personality, Mansfield's characters are outcasts, exiles, minorities and fringe dwellers. They are often on the move and experience the in-betweenness leaving the suggestion that their cultural identity is not fixed but rather subject to transition and change. Through the description of her 'transitory moments' in her stories, Mansfield tried to grasp the reflection of her own exile position. Mansfield's own rootless and exile conditions are expressed in more than one way - through the unity of the characters, the use of the symbolic landscape, the 'liminial' places and spaces and the wistful rendering of home. Her nostalgic melancholy for 'home' and the fantasy of emotional settlement render the short stories like *The Garden Party*, *At the Bay* which show her literary par excellence and artistic greatness.

Different Writers from imperial colony are much more preoccupied with the treatment of the recurrent thematic aspects in their writing i.e. the problem of defining 'home' as well as the cultural and emotional confrontation with the New World. The distance between the Old and New world creates gulf. The new represent something different which is not counted on. After becoming the colonial subject, her critical self was shaped by the disjunction between imperial centre and the colonial periphery and the permanent dislocation caused by being in-between both the worlds but not fully belonging to either. This gulf also invites the

treatment of in-between position and writer's negotiation between dominator culture and the settler culture in her stories.

Three stories of Katherine Mansfield will be taken into consideration to locate the psycho-ethnic conflict ingrained in her short stories. The critics Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr are under the impression that Mansfield's "...fiction and autobiography are tightly interlocked" and that in her case "...fiction and autobiography form a single indivisible opus". The imprint of the creative exile she wilfully enters into is fore grounded in her stories like *The Garden Party*, *At the Bay* and *'Je Ne Parle Pas Français*. The setting of the story, the description of the character and places, glimpse of epiphany experienced by characters and effects of looking back betray her intention in these stories. The glaring common facet of the two stories is the way in which characters are imbued with the symbolic significance. Thus the landscape functions beyond mere a background of the story and it minutely traces the progress in the character as well as in the story. Through the use of the imagery and symbols Mansfield in *The Garden Party* highlights and brings into play the complex relationship between development of the characters and place, luminal spaces and a nostalgic rendering of a New Zealand setting. The story *The Garden Party* opens with the description of the lush green garden and meadows analogous to the idealised earthly paradise where the bushes displaying their heavenly charm bend to the ground.

"Windless, warm, and the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold as it is sometimes in early summer. [...] As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels."

Here Mansfield's use of the archetypal images and pastoral conventions in the story contributes to a nostalgic rendering of the New Zealand landscape. Mansfield's own position of not-belonging is reflected in her preoccupation with places and by her use of the symbols and imagery displaying the unity between character and place. In this story Laura Sheridan's, the protagonist of the story, development as character is related with the landscape rendered the story. The description of the garden and how the characters inhabit it, the spaces and the

in-betweeness of the characters reflect Mansfield's own exile experience. On the other hand Laura, on being told by her mother, calls on the bereaved family with the leftovers of the party. Having seen the dead body Laura seems to have experienced a moment of epiphany revealing her in-betweeness of the ignorance and knowledge about life and death. The wavering of the characters' life express their fragmented self which is the reflection of Mansfield's own self.

Although social class is the issue and ideological contradiction are also to be explored in this story. Laura Sheridan is a vivacious, teenager charming girl, replete with ideology of love and compassion. On being informed about the death of their neighbour on that day when a party is going to be held in their home, Laura immediately comes to decision to call off the party out of the respect of the bereaved family who has lost their dear ones that very day. But her sister's and mother's reaction to the news of the death make Laura astonished. For them it is 'absurd' to call off the party and amusement for the marginalized section of the society. "...don't be so extravagant" Joes cried out at Laura. "If you are going to stop a band playing every time someone has an accident..." Laura's ideology confronts the contradictions in the utterances of her mother and sister. She immediately voiced her resistance to theirs. But her juvenile ideology was foiled by the dominant voices represented by her mother and sister.

In *At the Bay* the entire story is embellished with natural description .The most important feature is the way descriptions of landscape are dominated by recurrent images pregnant with symbolic significance. Thus, through the investigation of the landscape giving a framework where the interior and exterior worlds of the characters can be explored. According to Maxwell, the natural descriptions in this story cease to be merely decorative. The natural description becomes a functional part of the artistic structure of the work " and thus contributes to the meaning of the text". Maxwell argues that the exiled writers from the white Commonwealth countries took a special interest in the features of their physical surroundings in order to make sense of their present situation of incomplete 'self' and desiring to go back to the complete and whole world of nostalgia. This 'sense of incompleteness' of self of the characters reflects Mansfield's own.

In the case of *At the Bay*, the landscape described is realistic in the sense that it is geographically placed in a particular bay on New Zealand. For instance, Linda rests under the

“manuka tree”, which is a small tree native to New Zealand and Australia. The lifestyle of the family is also marked by the warm climate, especially during summertime, induces the members of the family to take their siesta in the middle of the day. The characters are displaced for a short period of time during their summer vacation in Mansfield’s story. The characters move around the bay and stay in the temporary location of their summer house, which is not their permanent home. But more importantly the context of transit is present on a metaphorical level through the emphasis on the transition of the shifting atmospheres, the epiphanies that the central characters experience as well as the mental journeys they undertake when their minds wander. The main characters are constantly rendered on transition points where they wander from one mental state to the other experiencing luminal in-betweenness.

The symbolic landscape, the experience of the characters and the way the characters interact with the natural elements will therefore illuminate postcolonial aspects of the story. Beryl is a lonely and isolated character, and her isolation is illustrated by her inability to express herself as well as her role in the family. Beryl is unmarried, and remains in an in-between position in the Burnell family. Her roles as sister, daughter and aunt demand participation in family life, but she remains a caretaker without any real authority and her position is not clearly defined. This induces a sense of loneliness. As a parallel to the luminal mental states of the characters, the narrative is pierced by descriptions of moments when the atmosphere and light suddenly change. These uncanny moments involve anxiety, as Kezia and Lottie experience when dusk falls: this is also the main source of unity between character and place because Mansfield aligns the moments of suspension with the “sea’s rhythm of ebb and flow”.

In the story *At the Bay*, the very word ‘bay’ is recurrent throughout the story revealing the very palace and its inhabitant’s attitude towards their surroundings. Angela Smith is of the opinion that the bay itself is a in-between place, because it is an area of protection between the land and the sea not entirely safe. Thus, the coastal location becomes in-between the land and the sea. In *At the Bay* the temporary luminal in-between can also be located. The beginning of the story is set in the transitional period between darkness and light. The dense mist at the dawn marks the transitional moment because the rising sun makes it dissolve. Nostalgic images are frequent, particularly expressed in the descriptions of landscape. The

personified landscape draws attention to New Zealand's distinctiveness. In the articulated vision of her characters, Mansfield made it clear that she wanted a return to the New Zealand setting, to her "own country" and "the people we loved there" in a landscape which is mysterious, as though floating Mansfield's position as a writer "out of country", and the act of looking back and attempting to reclaim a lost past, resulted in a nostalgic rendering of New Zealand.

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