SOCIAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK NOVELS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHO‘LPON AND E. M. FORSTER

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Abstract: This thesis examines the representation of individual social identity and cultural boundaries in Uzbek and English novels through a comparative reading of Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va kunduz (Night and Day) and E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India. Although the novels emerged from different literary, historical, and political environments, both explore the individual’s position within socially divided communities and demonstrate how cultural, religious, gender, and colonial boundaries influence personal identity. Cho‘lpon represents early twentieth-century Turkestan through characters whose lives are constrained by patriarchal traditions, social hierarchy, ignorance, and colonial political structures. Forster, writing about British India, constructs encounters between British and Indian characters in which national, racial, religious, and institutional boundaries determine interpersonal relationships. The comparative analysis demonstrates that both novels portray identity not as an isolated psychological phenomenon but as a socially constructed process shaped by power relations and cultural expectations. At the same time, the novels differ significantly: Cho‘lpon places greater emphasis on national awakening and the internal transformation of Turkestan society, whereas Forster focuses on the difficulty of establishing genuine human relationships under colonial rule. The comparison confirms that literary representations of cultural boundaries can reveal broader mechanisms of social exclusion, cultural hierarchy, and identity formation.

Keywords: comparative literature, social identity, cultural boundaries, Cho‘lpon, E. M. Forster, Kecha va kunduz, A Passage to India, colonialism, national identity, cultural difference, Uzbek literature, English literature.

Introduction

The problem of individual identity occupies an important position in twentieth-century literature because literary characters are frequently represented in relation to social institutions, cultural traditions, political authority, and collective identities. Comparative literature provides an opportunity to examine how similar problems acquire different meanings in different historical and cultural contexts.

Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va kunduz and E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India are particularly productive texts for such comparison. Cho‘lpon’s novel was published in 1936 and depicts the social and cultural environment of early twentieth-century Turkestan. Forster’s A Passage to India, published in 1924, is situated in British India and examines relationships between British colonial representatives and Indian society. The novel centres on characters such as Dr Aziz, Mrs Moore, Adela Quested and Cyril Fielding and presents their relationships against the institutional structure of colonial India.

The central research problem is therefore how individuals construct, experience, and negotiate their social identities when confronted with cultural boundaries. In Cho‘lpon’s novel, these boundaries are connected with gender, family, social hierarchy, religious authority, education, and colonial circumstances. In Forster’s novel, cultural boundaries are particularly visible in the relationship between British and Indian communities, as well as in religious and social divisions within India.

The theoretical framework of the study draws on postcolonial approaches to identity and cultural difference. Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes concepts such as cultural hybridity, liminality, ambivalence, and

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the "in-between" position of individuals located between cultural systems [1, pp. 1–18, 94–122]. His approach is particularly useful for examining characters who cannot be understood exclusively through a single cultural identity.

Methodology

The study employs comparative-textual, historical-cultural, and postcolonial approaches. The primary texts are Cho'lpon's Kecha va kunduz and Forster's A Passage to India. The analysis concentrates on characterization, social hierarchy, cultural conflict, gender relations, religious identity, colonial power, and the representation of interpersonal communication.

The comparative method is used not to establish a direct literary influence between the two authors but to identify structural similarities and significant differences between two novels produced in different historical environments. This distinction is essential because Cho'lpon and Forster belonged to different literary traditions and represented different colonial contexts.

The theoretical component incorporates Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity and liminality [1, pp. 1–18, 175–199], Edward Said's analysis of cultural representation and imperial discourse [2, pp. 1–28], and Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities and national consciousness [3, pp. 9–46]. Anderson's discussion of national consciousness is particularly relevant because language, literature, historical memory, and collective identification contribute to the formation of modern national identities.

Results

The comparative analysis demonstrates several important similarities.

First, both novels establish individual identity through social relationships. Characters do not exist independently of their communities. Their social positions influence their opportunities, relationships, and perceptions of themselves.

Second, both texts represent cultural boundaries as mechanisms of social division. In A Passage to India, the British colonial community and Indian society remain institutionally and psychologically separated. The novel's Chandrapore setting, the British club, the mosque, and the Marabar Caves become important spaces for encounters between different cultural groups. The novel's structure itself moves between social and cultural spaces, emphasizing the difficulty of establishing lasting communication across colonial boundaries.

Third, Kecha va kunduz presents social boundaries primarily through family, gender, religious authority, class relations, and colonial political conditions. The character of Zebi is particularly significant because her personal destiny is determined by social structures that restrict female autonomy. Recent scholarship likewise identifies women's inequality, lack of education, and patriarchal social relations as central social problems represented in the novel.

Fourth, education and intellectual awareness function as important mechanisms of identity transformation. Cho'lpon associates social awakening with the development of critical consciousness and cultural renewal. Scholarship on the novel has specifically identified education and personal development as factors opposing social inequality [8, pp. 24–28].

Finally, both authors demonstrate that cultural boundaries are connected with power. The British characters in Forster's novel possess institutional authority within the colonial system, while many Indian characters must negotiate that authority. In Cho'lpon's novel, social and political authority similarly influences individual possibilities. Consequently, identity is represented as a process shaped by unequal access to social and cultural power.

Analysis and Discussion

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The most important similarity between the two novels lies in their representation of identity as relational. An individual's identity becomes meaningful through relationships with family, community, religion, gender expectations, and political institutions. This perspective corresponds with Bhabha's argument that cultural identity is produced within complex spaces of difference rather than existing as a fixed and isolated essence [1, pp. 121–145].

Forster's treatment of cultural boundaries is especially visible in the relationship between Dr Aziz and the British characters. Aziz is an Indian Muslim doctor who possesses professional and intellectual qualities, but his social position remains influenced by the colonial hierarchy. His relationship with Fielding demonstrates the possibility of cross-cultural friendship, while the wider colonial environment repeatedly limits that possibility. The novel therefore distinguishes between individual sympathy and institutional power.

Mrs Moore also occupies an important intermediary position. Her initial encounter with Aziz at the mosque demonstrates that cultural contact is possible when the individual approaches another culture without immediate hostility. Nevertheless, the broader colonial system remains stronger than individual goodwill. Forster thus presents a fundamental contradiction: interpersonal communication may overcome cultural boundaries temporarily, while political and institutional structures continue to reproduce them.

The Marabar Caves intensify this problem. They function not merely as a physical location but as a space in which established categories of meaning become unstable. Scholarly research on the novel has described its settings and characters through the concepts of liminality, East-West encounter, and cultural hybridity [10, pp. 356–364].

Cho'lpon's treatment of cultural boundaries operates differently. In Kecha va kunduz, the principal conflict is not simply between two national cultures. Internal social divisions are equally important. Gender, family authority, religious conservatism, education, social status, and colonial political conditions interact with one another.

Zebi's position illustrates how gender becomes a cultural boundary. Her identity is determined to a considerable extent by expectations imposed upon women. Her individual desires encounter a social order in which women have limited control over major decisions affecting their lives. Recent studies of the novel similarly emphasize the representation of women's rights, patriarchal restrictions, and gender inequality [7, pp. 44–46].

Miryoqub provides another important dimension of social identity. His character demonstrates the tension between personal ambition and the social-political environment surrounding him. Through such characters, Cho'lpon constructs a society in which individuals may reproduce the very structures that constrain them.

The contrast between the two authors is therefore significant. Forster's novel primarily examines the cultural consequences of British colonialism and the psychological difficulties of East-West interaction. Cho'lpon's novel focuses more strongly on internal social problems and the possibility of national and intellectual awakening within colonial Turkestan.

The concept of national identity is useful in interpreting this difference. Anderson argues that modern national consciousness is historically connected with language, print culture, collective memory, and the development of imagined communities [3, pp. 37–46, 67–82]. Cho'lpon's literary activity can consequently be considered within the broader context of the development of modern Uzbek national consciousness. His representation of social injustice and intellectual awakening transforms individual suffering into a broader social question.

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At the same time, the comparison should avoid reducing A Passage to India to a simple opposition between "English" and "Indian." Forster also represents differences within Indian society, including religious and social distinctions. Scholarship on the novel has noted both the representation of English cultural superiority and the internal divisions among Indian characters [11, pp. 1–15].

Thus, both novels challenge the assumption that culture is homogeneous. Each demonstrates that communities contain internal differences and that individuals can occupy ambiguous positions within them. Bhabha's concept of the "in-between" cultural position is particularly applicable here because characters may simultaneously participate in different social and cultural structures [1, pp. 199–245].

The comparative perspective therefore reveals a broader literary principle: cultural boundaries are not merely geographical borders. They can be created by gender, religion, class, language, education, political authority, and social conventions. Literature makes these invisible boundaries visible by placing individual characters within concrete social conflicts.

Conclusion

The comparative study of Cho'lpon's Kecha va kunduz and E. M. Forster's A Passage to India demonstrates that social identity is constructed through interaction between the individual and the surrounding cultural environment. Both novels portray characters whose personal lives are affected by cultural boundaries and unequal relations of power.

Forster represents the colonial encounter between British and Indian societies and demonstrates how institutional colonialism limits the possibility of genuine intercultural relationships. Cho'lpon, in contrast, represents the social and cultural contradictions of early twentieth-century Turkestan, emphasizing gender inequality, traditional authority, ignorance, and the need for intellectual and national awakening.

Despite these differences, both novels demonstrate that identity is neither completely individual nor culturally fixed. It is produced through social relationships, historical circumstances, cultural expectations, and power structures. Their comparative reading therefore contributes to a broader understanding of how English and Uzbek literature represent cultural difference, social inequality, and the individual's search for identity.

The study confirms that comparative literature can establish meaningful connections between texts from different linguistic and historical traditions without ignoring their cultural specificity. In both novels, cultural boundaries become a major literary mechanism through which authors investigate social authority, human relationships, individual freedom, and the possibility of overcoming division.

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