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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 article examines the representation of social identity and cultural boundaries in Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va Kunduz (Night and Day) and E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India. The comparative study focuses on the ways in which literary characters construct, negotiate, and lose their social identities under conditions of cultural hierarchy, political domination, gender inequality, and social transformation. Although the novels emerged from different historical and geographical contexts, both explore the tension between individual identity and socially imposed categories. Cho‘lpon’s novel represents early twentieth-century Turkestan through the experiences of characters whose personal lives are constrained by patriarchal traditions, social hierarchy, ignorance, and colonial political structures. Forster’s novel, published in 1924, examines relations between British colonizers and Indian subjects in the context of the British Raj. Particular attention is paid to Zebi and Miryoqub in Cho‘lpon’s novel and Dr. Aziz, Cyril Fielding, Adela Quested, and Mrs. Moore in Forster’s work. The research employs comparative-historical, contextual, textual, and postcolonial approaches. The analysis demonstrates that cultural boundaries in both novels are not merely geographical divisions but social and psychological structures that determine communication, belonging, personal freedom, and interpersonal relationships. The study concludes that both authors expose the contradiction between individual human identity and rigid social classifications, although Cho‘lpon emphasizes national awakening and internal social reform, while Forster concentrates more explicitly on colonial power, intercultural misunderstanding, and the limitations imposed on friendship by imperial structures.

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

Introduction

The relationship between individual identity and social environment represents one of the central problems of twentieth-century literature. Modern novels frequently portray individuals whose personal aspirations conflict with established social structures, cultural traditions, political institutions, and collective expectations. In this context, comparative literary analysis makes it possible to examine similar human problems across different historical and cultural environments. Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va Kunduz and E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India provide particularly productive material for such a comparison.

Cho‘lpon’s Kecha va Kunduz occupies an important position in modern Uzbek literature. The novel was first published in 1936, while its first part, Kecha, was written in the 1930s. The 2021 Akademnashr edition, prepared by Dilmurod Quronov in accordance with the text of the first edition, contains 336 pages and emphasizes the importance of the 1936 publication as a primary textual basis for the novel [1]. AKBT Urdo

The novel portrays Uzbek society during a period characterized by profound political and social tensions. Its fictional world contains different social groups, patriarchal relationships, religious authority, economic inequality, colonial administration, and emerging forms of modern consciousness. Zebi, Miryoqub, Akbarali, Razzoq So‘fi, Poshshaxon, and other characters are not

simply individual personalities; their identities are continuously shaped by family, gender, social status, economic position, religious expectations, and political circumstances [1].

Forster's A Passage to India, first published in 1924, similarly examines individuals living within a complex system of cultural and political boundaries. The novel is set in British India and centers on the relationships between Indians and British colonial officials. The modern Vintage edition contains 368 pages [2]. Penguin Random House The novel focuses particularly on Dr. Aziz, an Indian Muslim doctor; Cyril Fielding, a British educator; Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore, English visitors; and the Anglo-Indian administrative community. Their relationships reveal how colonial hierarchy affects even apparently private matters such as friendship, hospitality, marriage, trust, and personal identity.

The two novels therefore offer significant comparative possibilities. Cho'lpon writes from within a Central Asian society undergoing political and intellectual transformation, while Forster examines British colonial India from the perspective of an English novelist who was nevertheless critical of imperial attitudes. Both works demonstrate that identity is not formed independently of society. Instead, it is produced through relationships between individuals and institutions, between tradition and modernity, and between dominant and subordinate cultural groups.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how social identity and cultural boundaries are represented in Kecha va Kunduz and A Passage to India, identifying both similarities and differences in the authors' treatment of these issues.

Methodology

The study applies a comparative-literary methodology combining historical-contextual analysis, close textual reading, comparative characterization, and postcolonial interpretation.

The historical-contextual approach is used to examine the social and political environments represented in the novels. For Cho'lpon, this involves consideration of early twentieth-century Turkestan, Jadid intellectual culture, social hierarchy, patriarchal traditions, and the political conditions of the period. Recent scholarship confirms that Cho'lpon's works address colonial rule, national awakening, enlightenment, national identity, freedom, and social inequality through the psychological experiences of individuals [3]. Support Science

For Forster, the analysis considers the institutional structure of British colonial rule in India and the resulting separation between British administrators and Indian subjects. Scholarly discussions of A Passage to India repeatedly identify cultural conflict, colonial hierarchy, racial prejudice, and the difficulty of friendship between Indians and British characters as central concerns of the novel [4]. Ebooks Inflibnet

Close textual analysis is employed to examine characterization, narrative situations, spatial organization, symbolic structures, and interpersonal relationships. Particular attention is given to the social position of Zebi, Miryoqub, Dr. Aziz, Fielding, Adela, and Mrs. Moore.

A comparative approach is then applied to determine how similar concepts function differently in the two literary traditions. The study does not assume that Turkestan and India were historically identical. Instead, it compares literary mechanisms through which social hierarchy and cultural difference influence individual identity.

Postcolonial theory is used as an additional interpretive framework. Edward Said's analysis of Western representations of empire is especially relevant because A Passage to India has been extensively discussed in relation to Orientalism and imperial discourse [5]. Lisa Lowe's study of the reception of Forster's novel likewise places it within the broader history of British and French Orientalist literary discourse [6, pp. 102–135]. JSTOR

The study is qualitative rather than statistical. Consequently, numerical statistics are not artificially introduced where the literary sources do not provide quantitative data. Historical and bibliographic facts are distinguished from interpretive conclusions.

Results

The comparative analysis identifies several major dimensions of social identity and cultural boundaries shared by the two novels.

First, both novels demonstrate that social identity is relational. Characters understand themselves partly through their position in relation to other groups. In Kecha va Kunduz, social identity is determined by family status, gender, wealth, religious authority, education, and access to political power. In A Passage to India, identity is additionally structured by colonial nationality and racial hierarchy.

Second, both novels present cultural boundaries as mechanisms of social control. Cultural difference is not merely a matter of language, dress, religion, or customs. It influences who is allowed to speak, who possesses authority, whose interpretation of events is accepted, and who is excluded from social institutions.

Third, female identity is particularly restricted in Cho‘lpon’s novel. Zebi’s personal development is controlled by patriarchal structures and by expectations concerning marriage, obedience, morality, and female behavior. Contemporary scholarship on the novel has similarly emphasized the representation of women and the oppressive social conditions affecting female characters [7]. inLibrary

Fourth, Forster constructs cultural boundaries through the colonial division between British rulers and Indian subjects. Dr. Aziz’s professional and personal identity cannot be separated from his position as an Indian Muslim living under British rule. His relationship with Fielding demonstrates that interpersonal sympathy cannot completely overcome an unequal political structure.

Fifth, physical spaces function as representations of cultural boundaries. In A Passage to India, Chandrapore, the Civil Station, the mosque, the Marabar Caves, and Mau establish different forms of cultural contact and separation. Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of colonial space and the Marabar Caves in the novel’s construction of cultural and political divisions [8]. ASJP

Sixth, both novels connect individual identity with broader historical transformation. Cho‘lpon’s characters exist within a society moving toward intellectual and national awakening, whereas Forster’s characters are caught within the contradictions of British imperialism and the emerging Indian independence movement.

Analysis and Discussion

Social Identity in Kecha va Kunduz

Cho‘lpon’s novel presents identity as inseparable from social environment. Zebi is perhaps the clearest example. Her identity is constructed within a patriarchal household and a social system in which women have limited control over decisions affecting their lives. Her personal desires and psychological world exist in tension with the expectations imposed upon her.

This tension is significant because Zebi cannot simply choose an identity independently. Her social position as a young woman determines the possibilities available to her. Marriage, family honor, religious expectations, and male authority become mechanisms through which her individual identity is controlled.

The novel therefore presents gender as a major cultural boundary. The boundary between male and female is not simply biological; it is institutional and behavioral. Men possess greater freedom to participate in public life, establish economic relationships, influence political affairs, and exercise authority. Women, by contrast, are largely associated with domestic space and social obedience.

The treatment of Zebi can consequently be interpreted as a critique of social structures that reduce an individual to a predetermined social role. Her tragedy is not merely personal. It reflects a wider conflict between individual human potential and restrictive social institutions.

Miryoqub represents a different form of identity. His character is associated with social mobility, practical intelligence, ambition, and adaptation. Unlike Zebi, he is able to move between different social environments. His identity is therefore more flexible. However, this flexibility does not necessarily represent moral or psychological freedom. His ability to adapt to existing structures can also mean participation in them.

This distinction is important. Cho'lpon does not simply divide society into "traditional" and "modern" individuals. Instead, he portrays modernity as an unstable process in which individuals may acquire new opportunities while remaining connected to old forms of power.

Recent literary scholarship has identified recurring motifs in Kecha va Kunduz, including the opposition between darkness and enlightenment, closed space and freedom, authority and justice, woman and objectification, colonial oppression and national awakening [9]. Tamaddun Nuri Jurnali These motifs support the interpretation of the novel as a study of identity within a transforming society.

Social Identity and Colonial Difference in A Passage to India

Forster's treatment of identity is more explicitly connected with colonial hierarchy. Dr. Aziz is simultaneously an individual, a doctor, an Indian, a Muslim, and a colonial subject. These identities interact throughout the novel.

The opening discussions among Aziz, Hamidullah, and Mahmoud Ali immediately establish the problem of Anglo-Indian friendship. The question is not whether individuals can theoretically like one another but whether genuine equality is possible within a colonial political structure. The novel therefore transforms a political question into a question of interpersonal identity.

Fielding represents an unusual British identity. He does not conform fully to the racial and cultural prejudices of the Anglo-Indian administrative community. His relationship with Aziz demonstrates that personal sympathy can cross cultural boundaries. However, the relationship ultimately remains limited by the colonial structure surrounding them.

The significance of their relationship has been emphasized by scholarship examining colonial friendship. Shun Yin Kiang argues that friendship in the novel should be understood through the relationship between personal contact, social space, and colonial power rather than simply as a successful or unsuccessful interpersonal event [10]. Journal Hosting

The Bridge Party provides another important example. The event is formally designed to bring British and Indian communities together. Yet the very organization of the event reveals the existing social distance. Cultural contact becomes institutionalized rather than genuinely spontaneous.

Forster therefore exposes a paradox: colonial society creates opportunities for contact while simultaneously establishing conditions that prevent equality.

Cultural Boundaries and Misunderstanding

One of the most important similarities between the two novels is the representation of misunderstanding.

In A Passage to India, misunderstanding emerges through differences in language, religion, social conventions, race, gender expectations, and political status. Mrs. Moore's encounter with Aziz initially appears to overcome cultural difference. Her willingness to remove her shoes before entering the mosque becomes an important gesture of respect. However, later events demonstrate the fragility of such understanding.

The Marabar Caves represent an extreme form of cultural and psychological uncertainty. The echo destroys stable distinctions between voice and response, individual and environment, intention and interpretation. Contemporary scholarship has interpreted the cave episode through questions of perception, sound, psychological experience, and Orientalism [11]. Letras

The caves therefore function not simply as a physical location but as a symbolic challenge to the characters' attempts to impose rational categories upon India.

In Kecha va Kunduz, misunderstanding operates differently. Cultural boundaries are largely internal to the society represented by Cho‘lpon. Conflicts arise between traditional and reformist attitudes, between male and female experiences, between educated and uneducated groups, and between personal morality and institutional authority.

Thus, Forster primarily emphasizes an intercultural colonial boundary, while Cho‘lpon emphasizes intra-cultural social boundaries. Nevertheless, both demonstrate that identity becomes unstable when individuals encounter social systems that deny the complexity of human experience.

National and Cultural Identity

National identity is particularly important in Cho‘lpon’s literary worldview. His writing developed during a period of intellectual and national awakening in Turkestan. Scholarship on his work emphasizes the relationship between national consciousness, enlightenment, freedom, and social inequality [3]. Support Science

In Kecha va Kunduz, the individual’s suffering can therefore be interpreted within a broader social transformation. The “night” of the title functions as an important symbolic framework for oppression and limited consciousness, while the concept of “day” suggests enlightenment and transformation. The incomplete nature of the novel reinforces the sense of historical transition rather than presenting a fully resolved social transformation [9]. Tamaddun Nuri Jurnali

Forster’s novel approaches national identity from another direction. Aziz gradually becomes more politically conscious and increasingly identifies British rule as incompatible with genuine friendship. At the end of the novel, his relationship with Fielding remains unresolved precisely because personal friendship is constrained by political reality.

Said’s analysis is particularly relevant here. In Culture and Imperialism, he identifies the tension between Forster’s humanist sympathy and the limitations of his representation of India [12]. The novel criticizes aspects of imperial domination but does not entirely escape the representational structures of Western discourse. Penguin Random House

This creates a productive distinction between the two authors. Cho‘lpon writes from the position of a colonized society seeking cultural and intellectual emancipation, whereas Forster writes from within the metropolitan culture of the colonizer while criticizing some of its assumptions.

Cultural Boundaries, Space, and Belonging

Space is another major comparative category.

In Cho‘lpon’s novel, domestic and public spaces encode social hierarchy. The household is not merely a physical environment; it represents the organization of patriarchal authority. Public institutions similarly reveal the unequal distribution of power.

Forster constructs an even more explicitly divided spatial structure. Chandrapore contains an Indian city and a separate Civil Station associated with British officials. The physical organization of the colonial town reflects the social hierarchy of imperial society.

The distinction between spaces also affects the characters’ identities. British characters are encouraged to remain within their own institutional community, while Indians are treated as outsiders within structures governed by British authority.

The Marabar Caves challenge these distinctions because they exist outside the controlled spaces of colonial administration. Recent scholarship has described the caves as a central site for the novel’s examination of knowledge, colonial representation, and the difficulty of defining India [8][11]. ASJP

Friendship as a Test of Cultural Boundaries

Friendship provides one of the strongest comparative points between the novels.

In Forster, Aziz and Fielding attempt to establish a relationship based on personal respect rather than political identity. Their friendship initially suggests the possibility of transcending cultural boundaries. Yet the colonial system repeatedly interferes.

The final meeting between Aziz and Fielding is particularly significant. Both characters recognize their personal affinity, but their political positions have changed. Aziz increasingly supports Indian independence, while Fielding remains connected to Britain. Their separation demonstrates that friendship cannot exist completely outside historical circumstances.

The novel consequently refuses a simplistic message that "understanding" alone can eliminate cultural conflict.

In Cho'lpon, interpersonal relationships are likewise shaped by social institutions. However, the most important boundaries involve gender, family, class, and political power rather than a simple colonizer-colonized binary.

This difference reveals two distinct models of identity formation. Forster emphasizes the external colonial boundary separating cultural groups; Cho'lpon emphasizes the internal social boundaries that regulate individuals within a colonized society.

Translation and the Transmission of Cultural Identity

The comparison is particularly relevant today because Cho'lpon's novel has increasingly become available to English-speaking readers through translation. Christopher Fort's English translation, Night and Day, has been examined in recent scholarship for its treatment of culture-specific expressions, stylistic features, and historical terminology [13]. Phoenix Publication

Translation itself becomes a cultural boundary. Concepts embedded in Uzbek social life cannot always be transferred into English without some degree of interpretation. Studies of Fort's translation have therefore focused on domestication, foreignization, cultural equivalence, and the preservation of culturally specific expressions [13][14]. Kokand SU Journals

This is important for comparative literature because the international reader encounters Cho'lpon's social world through a linguistic and cultural intermediary. The same problem exists in the opposite direction: Uzbek readers encounter Forster's India through English-language colonial discourse and subsequent translation practices.

Consequently, comparative literary research must distinguish between the cultural identity represented in the original text and the cultural identity reconstructed by translation.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Abdulhamid Cho'lpon's Kecha va Kunduz and E. M. Forster's A Passage to India demonstrates that social identity is fundamentally connected with cultural, political, and institutional structures.

Both novels portray individuals whose identities are constrained by social boundaries. Cho'lpon focuses particularly on gender, family, social hierarchy, religious authority, economic inequality, colonial conditions, and the tension between traditional and modern consciousness. Forster focuses more directly on the colonial division between British and Indian communities, demonstrating how race, political power, religion, and cultural misunderstanding influence interpersonal relationships.

Zebi's experience demonstrates the restrictive power of patriarchal social structures. Miryoqub illustrates the complexity of individual adaptation to changing social conditions. Dr. Aziz represents the psychological and political complexity of an educated colonial subject, while Fielding demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of liberal humanism within an imperial system.

The novels also differ in their treatment of cultural boundaries. In Kecha va Kunduz, boundaries are predominantly internal to Uzbek society and connected with social transformation. In A Passage to India, boundaries are explicitly intercultural and reinforced by colonial political power.

Nevertheless, the novels converge in one important respect: neither author treats identity as a fixed or purely personal category. Identity is produced through social relations. Individuals

become "women," "men," "Indians," "British," "Muslims," "officials," "subjects," "educated people," or "outsiders" through institutional and cultural processes.

The comparative reading therefore demonstrates the continuing relevance of both novels to contemporary comparative literature. Their significance lies not only in their historical representation but also in their exploration of a universal literary problem: how an individual attempts to preserve personal dignity and human identity within social systems that impose rigid boundaries.

Cho'lpon's novel emphasizes the necessity of enlightenment, social transformation, and national-cultural consciousness, while Forster's novel demonstrates the difficulty of achieving genuine human connection under colonial inequality. Read together, the works reveal that cultural boundaries are simultaneously external and internal: they separate communities, but they also become psychological structures within individuals themselves.

The comparative study ultimately confirms that Kecha va Kunduz and A Passage to India can be productively interpreted as novels of identity, boundary, and historical transition. Their differences arise from distinct cultural and political contexts, while their similarities demonstrate the capacity of the novel as a genre to investigate the relationship between individual freedom and collective structures.

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