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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Page No.
1	Dr. Jeyaseelan Gnanaseelan	A Corpus Analysis of the Prepositions used in Letter Writing in English	01
2	Abolfazl Ramazani & Sima Sharbaz	Dialogic Voices in T. S. Eliot's <i>The Waste Land</i>	16
3	Dr. Shamala Ratnakar	Multicultural Identity and Immigrant Tradition in Rohinton Mistry's <i>Squatter</i>	35
4	Shachi Sood & Dr. Vandhana Sharma	The Woman in the Body: Locating the Individuality within Patriarchy in Dattani's <i>Thirty Days in September</i> and <i>Ek Alag Mausam</i>	41
5	R. Saradha	From a Marginalist Vacuum towards a Nominalist Continuum: A study of Shoban Bantwal's <i>The Dowry Bride</i>	48
6	Dr. M. Lavanya & Prof. Dr. R. Ganesan	Perceived Physical and Psychological Stress among Higher Secondary School Students: A Pilot Study	57
7	Dr. Shivaji Sargar & Prof. Shivaji Kalwale	Allusiveness in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot with special reference to <i>The Waste Land</i>	65
8	Dr. R. R. Thorat	Use of Mythical Symbols in Raja Rao's <i>Kanthapura</i>	71
9	Dr. Pooja Singh & Dr. Archana	Glam to Sham: Woman's Innate Desire for Commitment	77
10	Dr. Sudhendu Giri	Modern Entrepreneurial Spirit in an Urbanised Economy	88
11	Ali Arian	The Elements of Humanity and Sufism in Henry David Thoreau's <i>Walden</i>	105
12	Tania Mary Vivera	Mindscaping Oskar Schell: Mental Spaces and Conceptual Blending in <i>Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close</i>	111
13	Mr. Chaitanya V. Mahamuni	Digital Video Watermarking Using DWT and PCA in Encrypted Domain	118
14	Dr. Aruna	Behaviour of Consumers Regarding Electronic Goods in Pune Region	129
15	B. Moses	Syntax and Semantic Problems in Translating Indira Parthasarathy's <i>Helicoptergal Keezhe Irangi Vittana</i> into English	134

16	Dr. Yogesh Jain	Mutual Funds & Other Financial Instruments: A Study of Customer Behaviour with special reference to Udaipur	138
17	Dr. S. Karthikkumar	Feminism vs. Humanism in Anita Rau Badami's <i>The Hero's Walk</i>	152
18	Dr. Shivani Jha	Ecocriticism and Ecocritical Interpretations of Selected Recent Indian Writings in English	156
19	Abu Siddik	Vivekananda's Vision of Religion: A Brief Survey of Hinduism and Islam	163
20	S.A. Thameemul Ansari	Best Practices in ELT: A Need for Reflection in the English Classroom	169
21	S. Rajeswari	The Big Heart: Conflict between Tradition and Modernity	176
22	Prof. Arvindkumar A. Kamble	Western Women in Oscar Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest'	185
23	Prabal J. Roddannavar	The Representation of Hatred in <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	188
24	Prof. Divya Chansoria & Mr. Umakant Gajbir	Democracy, Human Rights and Its Implementation	193
25	Mr. Chandan Bharti Mishra	An Analysis of Habitat Fragmentation and Recent Bottlenecks Influence	197
26	Dr. Shilpa Mishra	The Politics of HRM in India	202
27	Megha Katoria	Representation or Misrepresentation: Image of Women in Media	210
28	Dr. Ram Kalap Tiwari	Role of Spiritual Activities to Strengthen Mental Health and Well Being of Adolescents	215
29	Chintan V. Pandya, Jignasu P. Mehta, Aditee J. Jadeja & B. A. Golakiya	Antifungal Activity of Crude Extract of <i>Butea Monosperma</i>	226
30	Dr. Jaydeep Singh Dangi	<i>Computer par Hindi Suchana Praudyogikike Vikasmein Badha Nahin Balki Vikas Hain</i>	230
31	Angela Sadeghi Tehrani	A Rebellion through Confession – A Note on the Confessional Tone of the Poems of Kamala Das and Forough Farrokhzad	233
32	Dr. Riktेश Srivastava	Analysis of n-Tier Electronic Commerce Architecture Using Different Queuing Models	239
33	Nima Shakouri	Revisiting the Role of Gender in the Use of Language Learning Strategies: A Poststructuralist Look	247
34	Shahnawaz Ahmad Mantoo	Geo-strategic Importance of Bangladesh in Contemporary South Asia: An Analysis of Bangladesh-US Partnership	255
35	Ashish Kumar	Social Entrepreneurships in India: An Exploratory Study	261

**Western Women in Oscar Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest'****Prof. Arvindkumar A. Kamble***Arts, Commerce and Science College, Lasalgaon, Dist: Nashik (M.S.), India***Abstract**

All the western knowledge and the ideas seem to be Eurocentric. The western cultural theorists differentiate between westerns and non-westerns as 'One' and 'Other'. There are various issues that need to be addressed and enquired into to write in present. My present paper addresses the issue of western and non-western women through Oscar Wilde's comedy 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. The women characters in the comedy are found to be equally helpless, poor, irrational, deprived and different. The Orientalists differentiate the non-western by addressing the differences between western and non-western as 'Other'. However, they do not consider the commonalities between them. So, the western knowledge and ideas are Eurocentric which needs to be challenged.

**Key Words:** Eurocentric knowledge-Other women-Differentiation-Commonalities

I have been teaching Oscar Wilde's Victorian drama 'The Importance of Being Earnest' to the second year special English students at undergraduate students. It is a comedy by Oscar Wilde firstly produced in 1895 and the most enduringly popular comedy. Oscar Wilde initially titled it as 'A Trivial Comedy for Serious People. Later, he modified it as 'The Importance of Being Earnest'.

The students have enjoyed it when I correlated the Victorian issues of love and marriage with the contemporary issues in India. It is the continual flow of witty, uncompromisingly artificial dialogues and the characterization. They laugh at the fashionable young Victorian men and women. However, the experience of teaching Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest' always leaves me with innumerable questions in my mind. The sudden ending with the idea of the lost child doesn't satisfy

me. The dramatic action ends but my cycle of thought begins at the ending. The way in which the Victorian fashionable, well-mannered, well-educated and bold women compromise with their marriage partners raised the questions. They seem to be equally helpless and poor as the young women in India. They dramatically surrender to the masculine power and dominance of Victorian men. Here, I examine Oscar Wilde's comedy from the eastern and the western cultural point of view.

It is necessary to investigate into the British colonial period in India. The infamous British scholar Thomas Macaulay gives the full expression for the Indian apology for Indian maleness. According to him, India is colonisable because it lacks the real men. He insisted upon the racial effeminacy of the Bengali male. Therefore, he reformulates the colonial relationship in terms of the 'natural'

ascendency of men over women. He differentiates between the man and the woman and put the man over the woman.

Ashis Nandy in 'The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism (1983)' renders on the unquestioned dominance of European men at home and abroad. Nandy writes:

"Colonialism, too, was congruent with the existing Western sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented. It produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economical dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity (1983, P-4)".

Thus, Ashis Nandy, as the nationalist and the historians, protests against the 'colonial masculinity'. Oscar Wilde through his comedy 'The Importance of Being Earnest' also similarly protests the suspicious worth of manly British robustness. Wilde's denunciation of 'masculinity' supplies the basis of a blind national and colonial culture.

The European critics, historians and the theorists describe non-western as 'Other'. They define non-western as the 'Other' or the 'Oriental': inferior to the Europeans. Edward Said in 'Orientalism' says:

"The Oriental is irrational, depraved, childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, normal (1994, P-40)".

Thus, the Orient is understood in relation with the Oriental. Europe is in the position of domination in this process of relation. The Oriental is expressed as irrational, depraved, childlike, and different. On the other hand, the European becomes rational, virtuous, mature, and normal. While differentiation, the fact was not considered

that the Oriental lived in a different organized world of its own. The Oriental has its own national and cultural boundaries and principles of internal coherence. The Oriental gets identified by the West. Thus, identity and intelligibility are the two features of cultural relationship between the 'Orient' and the Occident i.e. East and West. The Eurocentric Orientalists differentiate between the Westners and non-westerners. Where does this difference come from? Edward Said finds that the knowledge of colonized or Orient creates the 'Other'. Further, they have been represented by the dominant frameworks. What Chandra Talpade Mohanty believe that the 'difference' between 'One' and 'Other' doesn't come from the knowledge but by differentiation between them. The westerners only considered the 'differences' and not the 'commonality' while the process of differentiation. The 'differences' might have been taken over the 'commonality'. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her essay 'Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles' points out that:

"What is interesting for me is to see how and why 'difference' has been embraced over 'commonality (SIGNS, Winter 2003, P-504)".

The Eurocentric critics only see the differences between the 'One' and the 'Other' but not the 'commonalities' purposefully for representing the non-Europeans as 'Other' for political dominance.

While teaching 'The Importance of Being Earnest', I do not find any manly quality or masculine power in Victorian British young

men like Jack and Algernon. They also equally lack the quality of the real man. Jack and Algernon seem to be desperately anxious to marry any young British girl. Moreover, they are consistently dominated by the British young fashionable girls like Gwendolen and Cecily. They are not sure and confident that they will get married with them. In the two proposal scenes, Jack and Algernon's dialogues are shorter without any romantic expressions comparing to the dialogues of Gwendolen and Cecily. In short, female characters are dominating throughout the drama. It is surprising to see that bold, fashionable and young girls like Gwendolen and Cecily surrender to the masculine power of Jack and Algernon. Finally, Jack realized that how it was important for him being Earnest. The young Victorian women Gwendolen and Cecily are equally irrational, depraved, childlike and not different from the non-western women as the Eurocentric critics claim. At the same time, male characters Jack and Algernon also do not have any manly qualities or masculine power. They differentiate between the westerns and non-westerns

without addressing the commonalities between them. This I believe the injustice and it is required to address the injustices of western knowledge and the ideas. The non-westerners are the subject and object of the Western theorists. Therefore, the non-western feminists must address the commonalities between the Western and non-western women and challenge the Eurocentric ideas of Europeans. Moreover, the feminist must also address the differences and commonalities at local as well as global level.

I would like to conclude my paper by stating that the various meanings of the West are Eurocentric and it is necessary to challenge the false universality of Eurocentric discourses. We need to reestablish the relation between the western and non-western world in today. We cannot write about the 'present' without revisiting or rediscovering the 'past'. I believe that we need to enquire into the Eurocentric western blind knowledge, culture, nationality and ideas. The enquiry into the past will put fire in the writing of present.

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