CHAPTER-I

Colonial Traits: The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib

Sara Jeannette Duncan’s very first English Indian novel is The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib written in 1893 after she came to India, as she married Mr. Everard Cotes, a British civil servant and curator of a museum at Calcutta. Jennifer Lawn in her article “The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib and the Prisonhouse of Language” remarks that, “Simple Adventures is written by a Canadian but set in India, focusing upon British citizens in temporary exile” (21). This observation on Lawn’s part makes it very clear that Duncan’s first novel about India is ambiguously not about India but about the English community living in India away from their own motherland. This novel is a true reflection of her own life in Indian subcontinent.

The Simple Adventures is Sara Jeannette Duncan's way of telling us something of how she adjusted to a strange life when in 1891 she went out to marry Everard Charles Cotes, the curator of the Indian Museum who shortly afterwards went into journalism and became the editor of the Indian Daily News. (Woodcock 215)

It is the story of an English memsahib and her day-to-day experiences in India. Memsahib is a general term used by native Indian community for the English ladies who used to visit India. D. Maya elaborates upon the term as “a hybrid coinage current in British India among the Indians to address a European lady with respect. The term acquired colonial overtones and has come to evoke an image of ethnic arrogance and cold
aloofness” (59). The text under scrutiny also defines ‘Memsahib’ as “one is not born a memsahib; the dignity is arrived at later, through circumstances, processes and sometimes through foresight on the part of one’s mamma” (1). So, the term ‘memsahib’ can be defined as a term used for European or western ladies who enter the Indian subcontinent by chance or by getting married to the English males residing in India. “Sara Jeannette Duncan is a typical Anglo-Indian novelist who reinforces the stereotypes of a memsahib” (Juneja 114). Sara Jeannette Duncan herself was residing in India. Her first hand experience of the life of English Indian community and especially of the memsahibs resulted in her writing of The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib. This novel is highly autobiographical like her well celebrated Canadian novel The Imperialist. The narrator’s two different mindsets, first of a young, nascent bride who comes with so many ideas in her brain and second of an experienced and properly transformed memsahib are dramatized by Mrs. Helen Browne and Mrs. Perth Macintyre respectively in the same novel.

The narrator of the novel is Mrs. Macintyre who takes the privilege of telling a story of Mrs. Helen Browne’s adventures in India. The narrator very shrewdly brings up the hypocrisy, snobbery and dullness of the life of the British-Indians. They grow dull in India because India has been portrayed as a bleak place where they find nothing entertaining and nice. This view is elaborated upon by Vimal Dhawan and Jitesh Parikh when they say:

*The Memsahib* is set in Calcutta, as *The Imperialist* was set is Elgin. We find Duncan’s consciousness vertically divided in the description of these two places. Elgin is a happy place where people are debating imperial
questions. Elgin shows a rare degree of maturity, foresight and confidence in its independent judgment, while Calcutta is a hell-hole, where the existence, the very survival of the Anglo-Indians is a big question. (27)

This observation initiates the analysis of novel. Why Elgin is a ‘happy place’ and Calcutta a ‘hell-hole’? Duncan being a Canadian had the first hand experience of being a colonized native and depending on that she, in her fictional narratives on India, ought to have strong sympathies for other colonial people of the globe as well, but, it was not the case. As D. Maya states about the Victorian women who thronged India during colonial period, “they were hardly prepared for the enormous and continuing cultural shock of India. In the encounter with India, their warped sensibilities forced a retreat into the exclusive English refuges built on the alien soil, away from contact with the natives” (61). Almost the same thing happened with Duncan during her early years of residence in India. Blindly following her contemporaries and the prevalent colonial discourse, Duncan’s genius got somehow mutated. Her fictional method of creating ‘types’ as well as the oriental and racial discourses led her to negate the Indians in her early works based on India.

Silvia Albertazzi in Imaginative and Creative Impulses in the New Literatures in English contends:

For Duncan the Indian background brings all the personal and social difficulties to the surface . . . It is not surprising, then, that a recurring theme of Duncan’s Indian fiction is the idea that most talented western people in India are doomed to waste their youth and energies in a cultural
desert. This is especially true for women, whose isolated lives are portrayed as cultural and emotional suicides. Duncan’s heroines realize that in India all western values amount to nothing. (51)

Like a typical representative of the occident Duncan criticizes and mocks at everything that is Indian, be it a man or an animal. In *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* Duncan was trying to make stereotypical images of her Indian and English characters and as a result of this her own early fiction, based on India especially, became a ‘type’ that is biased and colonizer’s version of fiction irrespective of her Canadian nationality.

The novel opens with an introduction of Miss Helen Francis Peachey who lives in Canbury and is fond of playing tennis. Regarding the opening of the novel, Parikh and Dhawan apprehends:

The first two chapters are set in England and the picture that emerges of the British Women is hardly complementary. One gets Jane Austanian kind of a glimpse of the British women’s social life and attitude. They are shown to be naive, ignorant and frivolous. Still, when compared to Indian characters, they are portrayed as superior and more intelligent. (28)

A very ironic portrayal of the British social life has been laid down in the opening chapter of the novel. The ladies who have been to India were enquired by Mrs. Peachey, Helen’s mother, regarding Helen’s trousseau for India and a confusing bundle of suggestions was provided to her. Helen was advised to buy her shoes “a size larger than usual, on account of the heat; she must remember to take a size smaller because she
would use her feet so little that they would decrease somewhat, everybody’s did” (8-9) and “India, to their imagination was incapable of subdivision, a vast sandy area filled with heathens and fringed with cocoanut trees” (9). The general reaction of the people of Canbury was not very appreciating for Helen who was about to leave Canbury for India. Her very close friends confided that, “they wouldn’t be in Helen’s place for anything” (9).

From the very beginning, India is being ‘stereotyped’ by describing its locale and climate and everything according to the English standards and thinking. A deteriorated and tarnished image is floated from the onset of the novel. India is place of the colonized and the discourse plays its role in establishing the superiority of the west.

Homi Bhabha in The Location of Culture holds the opinion that, “Colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible . . . It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism” (101). Therefore when Helen decides to marry Mr. Browne and settle in India, she was advised on many fronts about life in India starting from the climate and geographical set up to the people and society, everything is depicted in a negative light and therefore not suitable for an Englishman to live in. One lady wrote to her, “It is impossible to keep good dresses in India, the climate is simple ruination to them,” (8) and that living in India is a “heart breaking experience” (8).

Forster in an article titled “The Indian Boon” says, “India has reached the English imagination by different routes. To the stay-at-home of the eighteenth century India meant southern India, a land of coal black heathen and tropical vegetation wherein
elephants trumpeted and little Henry converted his bearer” (qtd. in Das 1). Thus based upon the varied observations and suggestions, the Peacheys family developed a dark image of India in their mind.

The doctrine of civilizing mission as proposed during the colonial period finds expression when Mrs. Peacheys holds that “Helen’s going to India was the good she would probably be able to do to those surrounding her” and as far as Helen was concerned “it was a sustaining thought that she was going amongst those whose need for her was so much greater than Canbury’s” (12). In one go Helen was projected as a savior for a nation, which according to the narrator is, in dire need of her. Helen’s father however had a different opinion and for him “Hindus were very subtle-minded . . . their ideas were entirely different from ours . . . He was afraid that there would be difficulties” (13). All these images of India thus manifest Edward Said’s point that “Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (Said 5).

Racial superiority is another trait which plays a significant part in the formation of colonial discourse. Misao Dean in A Different Point of View observes that “Duncan’s Indian novels also depict racial difference” (111) and this argument finds many illustrations within the text. Mrs. Peacheys dreams of Helen teaching a group of ‘little blacks’ and thinks that her daughter was going on a mission of ‘Heathen emancipation’. Helen was so obsessed that she thought that the way she would look at her subjects, that is her domestic help, would certainly have “its moral effect” (81) on them. The thought of correcting the natives or changing their behavior through her looks and gestures only is
itself a highly colonial idea. The colonizer believes that their behavior and their gestures are powerful enough to change and motivate the colonized.

This novel written by Duncan appears to be marred by the pre-conceived notions about India and Indians. The British colonial discourse prevalent at that time occupied such a distinct place in Duncan’s fiction that she almost lost her capacity of being a non-biased author. The contempt and hatred for the natives can be well illustrated throughout the text. Misao Dean in her article “Paintbrush and Scalpel: Sara Jeannette Duncan Representing India” opines that “to define ‘the native’ is to bring them into existence for the English reader, who has no knowledge of them outside the text and so to deny them an existence in themselves, is to deny them power to name themselves” (89). Not even a single native character is called by his name, thus proving Dean’s point. The native is either a Khitmudgar, Khansama, Mallie or a Rajah. He is a type rather than an individual and so by denying them any identity the author is making them invisible throughout the text. Her sympathies lie with the English community which according to Duncan’s thinking capacity was marginalized from the mainstream English community living and enjoying in England. Thereby it can be assumed that if Englishmen were marginalized in Indian colony then the Indians were doubly-marginalized in her Indian fictional world.

Colonialism perpetuates not only through politics but also through personal contact between two cultures that are poles apart, one west and other east. The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib is not a political novel but a domestic one that deals with a white girl, Helen and her day to day life in India. However her personal adventures have also been coloured from a colonial point of view.
Colonialism thus provides an expanded canvas even to the domestic novels which reveal the inextricable involvement of domestic British society in the colonial enterprise. At the same time the implicit presence in these novels of the ideas such as the savage nature of natives and the white man’s burden of bringing civilization to them involves these texts in the dissemination of racial and colonial ideologies that provided the conceptual framework for colonialism. (Evans Introduction)

Duncan through an incident of the breakage of Helen’s wedding cake, which she had brought with her from Canbury, appears to be symbolically portraying the degeneration and subsequent decay that comes into the lives of Englishmen when they land in India. The wedding cake “certainly had not carried well: it was a travelled wreck” (37). Similar was the case with the Englishmen who used to land up in India but later, with the passage of time their lives also get wrecked up like Helen’s wedding cake. The Englishmen do not find any kind of recreational activities in India and therefore become dull and monotonous during their stay.

K. Mallika in Canadian Literature and Society: National Dream and Regional Realities holds the opinion that “the English society is dominated by a sense of community . . . India may provide them with opportunities, raise their social status and surround them with an army of servants but still it is only a colony, a poor substitute for home, and as such it kindles nostalgic memories” (219). Thus a colony, India has no respect and it is called a “poor substitute for home”. The Englishmen never felt attached towards India. They had their own airs of superiority, over clouded by their myths of whiteman’s burden and civilizing mission. “Not only are they (the Englishmen) brave
and daring, but they are also gentlemen who have a firm knowledge of the difference between what is fair and what is unfair” (Grenberger 18). Thus with these perceptions and mindset, the Englishmen came to India but could not relate themselves to it.

Calcutta, a metropolis of modern India, forms the centre stage of the novel where the entire action/adventure takes place. This Indian city is depicted to be full of Englishmen; Indians are hardly seen and if they are, they are attending to their menial jobs of being servants or tailors. Jennifer Lawn in Canadian Literature South Asian Collection draws attention towards this kind of description of Calcutta and states, “Calcutta itself, referring not to the geographical location but rather to the complex Anglo-Indian social network in that city” (18). Thus Calcutta represents the British part of the Empire and not a city of the Indian subcontinent. Like Calcutta, the native people who live in Calcutta are barely visible. Neither they are dignified nor educated and labeled on the whole as cheats. In “Duncan’s Passage to India” Thomas Tausky says, “Indians do not exist in the world of the novel, except as picturesque or irritating underlinings” (45).

As the narrative moves on, Mr. and Mrs. Browne had to settle and therefore they start searching for a home, but the circumstances which were so taken over by the colonial discourse could not even help the poor couple, locate a perfect home. All the houses have “jungly compound” (53). The houses were all the same inviting lofty criticism from the Browns. Thus a colony always invited criticism and this basic criticism of a colonized country, lack of resources, lack of awareness all invited the colonizer to take a front seat and govern the colony in order to make necessarily amendments.
The attitude of Mr. Browne and that of the Indian landlords prove the point of established superiority of the west over the east.

Mr. Browne would beat upon the gates of the landlords enquiry “Qui Hai!” in tones of severe authority. These usually from a small and dingy domicile near the gate, issued a figure hastily, a lean brown figure, in a dirty dhoty, that slammed perfunctorily and stood before them waiting.

‘Iska ghur Kali hai?’ Mr. Browne world inquire and the figure would answer, “Ha!” whereat, without further parley, the Brownes would enter the place and begin to express their mind about it. Generally it invited criticism. (52-53)

The landlord “followed them about the place in silent - humility - they took him for a coolie, and young Browne treated his statements with brevity turning a broad British back upon him” (56) and ultimately the Brownes were successful in getting a home for themselves in a suburban area of Calcutta.

Socially, Brownes were acquainted with a very few Englishmen and hardly interacted with the Indians. Mrs. Browne was doubly separated from the natives. Her neighboring bustee was separated by a window “through it east and west gaze at each other but never touch” (163-2). Indrani Sen in the introduction of the book Memsahib’s Writings holds the opinion that:

Englishwomen’s colonial interactions with local women were made through the prism of race, class, caste, religion and region . . . memsahibs interacted mostly with women who belonged to the lower classes and
castes . . . the closest encounters on day to day basis were with the wet-
nurse and especially, the ayahs. (xiii)

Helen Browne’s only association with the natives, as stated above by Indrani Sen, was thought her servants and maid. She has generalized all of them as “cheats, especially the Bawarchi. It is so convenient to use generalizations to describe an Indian that there is no further need of any real analysis” (Parikh 28).

While introducing Helen to the domestic helps, Mr. Brown called the washerman as an “unmitigated rascal” (78) and told Helen that sweeper was outside and “you are never to see or to speak to him, or you’ll be lowered in the respect of the compound” (78). Thus the caste system prevalent in India, that was a big problem on the part of Indian culture and needed to be abolished according to British norms was being supported by Mr. Browne who was acting as the one really believing in class bifurcations thus bringing out the double standards adopted by the colonizer himself. As the narrative moves on there is a very pathetic description of a syce living along with a horse in the same shed.

The same roof sheltered both of these creatures of service, a thatched one; but between them a primitive partition went half-way up. On one side of this the pony was tethered and enjoyed the luxuries of his dependence, on the other the syce lived in freedom, but did not fare so well. The pony’s expenses were quite five times as heavy. His food cost more, his clothes cost more, his medical attendance cost more, to say nothing of his requiring valet. He was much the more animal of the two, though the other
is popularly believed in England to have a soul. His wants were even more elaborately supplied than the syce’s - he had a trough to feed from, and a pail to drink out of, a fresh bed every night, a box for his grains, and a curry - comb for his skin; while the syce’s domestic arrangements consisted of an earthen ware pot, a wooden stick and a rickety charpoy. (88)

Even more the pony’s side of shelter was double than the syce’s and it was much more hygienic. Taking into account the same instance J.Parikh opines that’

The callous indifference shown towards the syce, a human being is symptomatic of Duncan’s attitude towards Indians who are less valuable then the animals owned by British masters . . . This highly prejudiced view treating human beings worse than animals show a dehumanized Duncan, a typical colonial. (28)

Thus like a typical colonial, the attitude of Duncan towards the Indian subjects is totally negligent in her world of fiction. They don’t deserve a place better than the animals and at times animals are treated in a better way. To quote another instance from the text, during the summer season, when cholera spread “the Lovitt’s lost a bearer from this cause, and a valuable polo pony from heat apoplexy. The latter bereavement was in the paper” (215). Hence, the death of a pony was of more significance in the life of Lovitt’s than that of a poor native. In one go, the natives are reduced lower than the level of animals. A native human being is treated like a degraded and insignificant organism.
Throughout the narrative of the text we come across many animal images standing in comparison particularly to the Indians. One khansama at the guest house at Patapore “reminded one curiously of a goat” (42) and Helen’s team of servants have been compared to “cockroaches”. Mrs. Browne’s ayah ‘chua’ has also been described as the one signifying her name only. ‘Chua’ stands for a ‘rat’ and “she was very like one. It would be easy to fancy her nibbling in the dark, or making unwarrantable investigations when honest people were asleep” (92). So every Indian, whosoever, has been allowed to appear in the fictional adventure of the memsahib has been compared to an animal. Moreover the Indians in India exist with vultures and “hoarse ejaculations of the crows” (84).

Not only the natives but the fowls belonging to India, the woods and everything with any kind of Indian connection is inferior in its ranking. Mr. Browne corrected an Indian shopkeeper who was appreciating his chairs and commented that “the shisham are the superior” he (Mr. Browne) said “that the shisham are the less inferior. That is the better way of putting it, baboo” (64). It appears that the English could not tolerate anything being superior in India than they themselves. India has been painted as a land of centipedes, snakes and tigers. Barbarism is there in the land and the blood of the Indians. The Bustee of the natives in the vicinity of Helen’s home has been described by Helen as “an unsavory place, the world has a taste and a smell of its own” (161) and from these bustees there constantly arises smoke with a peculiar smell.

The text thoroughly highlights the colonizing Britons, their way of life and how they manage their daily affairs in an alien land. At times the narrator ironically portrays the underlined snobbery and hypocrisy of the resident English society but this portrayal
Duncan’s early fiction of India to be quitted off the charges of being one sided.

Duncan brings to the surface the hollowness of the lives of British-Indians especially, the memsahibs. These memsahibs used to keep themselves busy by visiting one another and by gossiping around. Helen Browne was bright and observant when she came to India and as stated earlier, was curious enough to know everything about life in India, but to utter disappointment her sense of curiosity gave way to pre-conceived notions and the observations she made were totally second hand. She got the impression of India and Indians from her husband and her English acquaintances. Mrs. Toote tells her that she found nothing ‘really elevating’ in this country. She also brought to Helen’s knowledge that English ladies mostly are very frivolous who “mess about charities, and . . . write eternal letters to their children in England” (114). Frequent visits by various English ladies to Helen, during her stay in Calcutta, helped Helen to frame her thinking about her hard stay in India and her Indian subjects that is her domestic helps. Mr. Browne revealed that the English society living in India is stratified according to their salaries. People “are all tagged” (132) and he further explains to his wife:

"You see there are so many people with superior claims - fifteen hundred, three thousand a month. It is an original place in this respect. The valuation of society is done by the Government. Most people arrive here invoiced at so much . . . they are always kept carefully ticketed and published and Calcutta accepts or rejects them religiously and gracefully at their market rates. (106)"
Thus, money decides the value or importance to be given to any particular individual in the British set up. The narrator very ironically states that the Government “affixes a tag to each man’s work and person describing him and all that he does. There is probably an office for the manufacture of these, and its head is doubtless known as the Distributor General of Imperial Tags to the Government of India” (131).

Through the mouth of her narrator, the writer gives vent to her thinking and plight of Englishmen living in India when she describes about the mindset of Englishmen when they come to India and their subsequent degeneration and disintegration during their long stay:

The old, old ambitions the stereotyped political aims, the worn competitions, the social appraisement - how they have repeated themselves through what illustrations of the great British average, even in my time! How little more than illustrations the men and woman have been as one looks back, pictures in a magic lantern, shadows on a wall! Good illustrations, through sharp reflections of the narrow conditions they lived in, solemn warnings to those that are so eager to come after, if only the glamour of India left people with eyes to see . . . And now let me think!
Some of them in Circular Road Cemetery – cholera, fever, heat-apoplexy; some of them under the Christian daisies of England - probably abscess of the liver; the rest grey faced Cheltenham pensioners, dull and obscure, with uncertain temper and an acquired detestation of the climate of the Great Britian. (129)
Helen Browne’s visit to Mr. Sayter’s home was also very interesting as the two thinking capacities, one very fresh to the Indian sub-continent and another a veteran and experienced one, clashed during the meeting. Helen opposed Mr. Sayter’s remark about India being a cold country and Mr. Sayter remarks, “you are still warm you still believe in thermometer, you still find the baboo picturesque – I know you do!” (142). He proved that Helen was fascinated to see India and that India had cast a spell on her but with the passage of time this impression would fade away. Mr. Sayter laments about the magnificent past of English people in India “and how people spent their money they! Big houses – turned into boarding - houses now – heaps of servants, horses entertained like princes! Now a days people live in flats, and cut the cook, and save the uttermost cowrie” (143). He was very depressed about the present condition of the English– Indian society which was not getting any kind of privilege of being the masters of a colony according to him.

“A major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement” (Ashcroft EWB 8). The British people living in India have been displaced from their motherland and thus are full of nostalgia and longing for their homeland. They want to acquire everything that would remind them of their home town. British community has been portrayed as the one that has been uprooted from their motherland and that they were planted in an alien land. To quote Bennette:

Some immigrant writers, . . . tell us of the struggle faced by all immigrants to another country, and of how, even in an officially multicultural country, one’s old culture and thus one’s identity, is always marginalized or under
threat. . . . to become a immigrant is thus always to become in some way colonized. (190)

So in their struggle to adjust they tried every possible thing and their level best to get themselves attached to their motherland once again. In this connection Mr. and Mrs. Browne’s acquisition of a stove in place of a chimney stands symbolic. This stove “was to mean for them the essence of home life in an unhomely like country” (154). The garden of Brownes was also filled with English flowers with whom even the mallie had come to perfect understanding which is “remarkable for they spoke a different language” (165) and it is pertinent to mention here that not even a single native bud was given space is that anglicized garden. Brownes were very considerate about their garden. “It was new to them, this friendly solace of the flowers of home” (166). These flowers were symbolic of their home-country and they (the flowers) made them feel near their motherland. This anglicized garden and the flowers therein “preserve the remanant of grace which is left in the Anglo-Indian soul, and keep it home-sick, which is its one dance of salvation . . . as for Helen it was simply Canbury to her” (166).

Thus very shrewedly the narrator, with the help of certain symbols, is once again playing upon the oriental and occidental issues. Native buds belonging to the east are not being given a place in the anglicized garden where as the eastern Mallie has been trained in such a manner that he starts understanding the needs of the western flowers. The colonizer did not allow any idea to enter and thus do not let any flower bloom that tries to intermingle the two contrasting worlds of the colonizer and the colonized as this would be a step forward to deconstruct the margins and the centre.
Living in India appears to be a herculean task for the British community. They made their own society, very different from the native’s and hardly bothered about the ‘other’. All the sahibs have turned into Pucca Sahibs and the ladies into Memsahibs. People do not care about the poor natives and blame games are always played to justify their own stance in the colonial set up. Helen’s transformation from a smart and intelligent girl to a typical hypocrite memsahib is also under process.

Thomas E. Tausky in “Duncan’s Passage to India” states that “Sara Jeanette Duncan shared the universal Anglo-Indian view that nothing but evil could come from uniformed parliamentarians” (43) and thus we come across a globe trotting M.P. Mr. Batcham who comes into a pre-established British society which is different from the English societies of Britain. They had their own ways of working and they hated any kind of interference in their work from Britain. According to Vimal Dhawan and Jitesh Parikh, “Duncan plays upon the amount of ignorance that the usual globe trotting M.P’s show about India. She is very ironic about his concern for India, paints him as a silly nincompoop who has no business to question the functioning of the Anglo-Indian administration” (30-31).

These globe trotters were unloved in Calcutta. Mr. Batchman, an M.P. had a “deep, raging and unquenchable thirst for facts” (170). The narrator also holds the opinion that these globetrotters just have bookish knowledge and were hardly aware of the ground realities. Mr. Batcham has also read recent publications on native India before coming and these volumes had given Mr. Batcham comprehensive ideas of native India, and he knew that “between Cape Comorin and Peshawar were lying two hundred and fifty million people urgently in need of his benevolent interference” (172). It was
generally believed that these M.P’s were never satisfied with the work done by the British in India and were continuously searching for the reasons of grief and sorrow in the condition of the natives. They were not concerned about the British-Indian societies’ problems. “Daily Mr. Batcham discovered more things that had been neglected and more things that had been done badly” (173). His opinion was to give freedom to the press and wanted “all native movements, movements that marked progress and emancipation should be warmly encouraged” (176).

Mr. Batcham could possibly be termed as a ‘real – observer’ as he is the only one speaking on the part of natives and highlighting the realities of the English societies of the east. This however is intolerable to the workers of Empire. The narrator observes that;

Mr. Batchman would find a very severe grief in the relations existing between Europeans and native society here, and naturally he could not find words to express his indignation at the insolent and indifferent front of his fellow countrymen towards the people of India . . . All . . . on account of a brown skin! (176-77)

However, Mr. Batcham has been very rudely handled and according to Thomas E. Tausly the author in order to retain her affinities with the colonizing societies portrays Mr. Batcham as a “defective character” who has “inability to defend himself in verbal duels with wise Anglo-Indians” (43). Not only Mr. Batcham, but the one who feels a little sympathy for the natives, is a defective character. But the problems proposed in front of him by the natives are termed as mere ‘hypothecations’ and the natives have also been
painted as cheats who lied to Mr. Batcham and deceived him as well. Jennifer Lawn also confirms:

In the world of *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* however, any character’s claim to truth is dubious. The reader doubts the accuracy of the gossip coming straight from Jimmy Forbes: ‘Servants’ recommendations all have a ‘horrible mendacity’: Chua’s law suit is a farce, with both parties bribing the witness: and the evidence which Batcham collects in pursuit of truth is anything other than ‘unbiased’ in every particular. (28)

Helen during her stay in India was told by her fellow memsahibs that one should learn some *Hindustani* words so that one can have an ease while commanding their domestic helps. *Hindustani* being the mother tongue of the natives helped the Anglo-Indians to convey their demands to the natives in an effective manner. *Hindustani* has been called the language “that belongs to the land of Khidmudgar” (232) and the Englishmen were supposed to know just a little bit of it and they can afford to forget it as soon as they would leave the country. Jennifer Lawn also confirms this point when she asserts:

Helen, a neophyte memsahib, eventually discovers that it is more desirable to speak like a memsahib . . . Hindustani, being the ‘tongue in which orders are given in Calcutta’ (81) aids domestic and state administration in Simple Adventures. British administrations assert power by learning only those terms absolutely necessary for maintaining control . . . Thus the sahib learns only the familiar forms of address, for he has no intention of
speaking to a native as an equal . . . To wield authority, the colonizing power must never meet colonizing culture halfway; it is ‘the essence of the imperialist vision’ that one world – view; one language- English- should reign supreme. (21-22)

Therefore a very few words that were necessary for the immediate conversation were acquired by Helen and she was also not very keen to learn a new language as according to the colonizers view everything belonging to the colonized culture stands at an inferior position. “The glimpses of everyday tragedy in the Anglo-Indian community that gives  *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* its tone of sadness and regret shows that the narrator’s sympathies are firmly with her colonial community, despite her understanding of imperial imperatives” (Dean *DPV* 36).

The condition and the so called sad plight of the colonizer’s community has been highlighted time and again throughout the narrative. It was the month of June and all the Englishmen were waiting desperately for the rains to come as it was all dry weather and even the beasts and the fowls were feelings the heat. “At the same time it drew up the evil soul of the odour of the bazaars, the ‘bura crab smell’ as Kipling calls the chief characteristic of Calcutta and cast it aboard in all the city” (249). The narrator very shrewdly used Kipling’s words to deteriorate India’s image. Rains, however, when they arrived were not appreciated at all like the rains of the west that are meant to replenish the worn out soil. This oriental rain “didn’t refresh the earth, but beat it and sat upon it” (251). These rains fail to induce a new life into their wasteland and on the contrary it spoiled their (Englishman’s) stuff and led them to suffer a lot.
Suffering was the lot of the colonizer. The Brownes during their visit to Dehradoon came across a person who was riding in a dandy and upon enquiring he replied, “liver complication, we all come to it. Your turn next hot weather. This country isn’t fit for a Christian to live in” (298). Furthermore, towards the last chapter of the novel, the narrator tags India as “a land of regrets” (300).

Therefore, whatever has been presented in the novel depicts that “India is necessarily ‘always already read’” (Lawn 25). The perils of the British in India and their subsequent degeneration gets reflected in the character of Helen Browne who turns into a cynical memsahib towards the end of the novel. The transformation she undergoes is not only physical but mental as well. “She has lost her pretty colour that always goes first and has gained a shadowy ring under each eye that always come afterwards” (30) and having “…. Fallen into a way of crossing her knees in a low chair that would horrify her Aunt Plovtree” (308) her smiles are “little tired” (308) and “domesticity has slipped away” (309) from her.

Helen who had come to India with some vision and inclination to help the natives has been “growing dull to India” (310) and she is hardly concerned about anybody except her husband and her little baby. Silvia Albertazzi in “Passage: The Indian connection from Sara Jeannette Duncan to Rohinton Mistry” in the Book entitled Imaginative and Creative Impulses in the New Literatures in English opines:

While in Duncan’s cosmos all ideals are reduced to meaningless echoes, the most significant factors of human life birth, love, death- cease to make sense; living is just carrying on, mere survival . . . In Duncan’s fiction this
situation is dealt with on two levels; accepting the impossibility of participating actively in a meaningless reality, the novelist simply and passively observes what is going on around her, while holding fast to the most widely accepted western beliefs on Imperial politics; on a deeper level, the impossibility of coping with the Indian background becomes a metaphor of the universal female difficulty of finding a place in male-centered world. (58)

Helen’s capacity for radical thinking was gradually lost and therefore she “sees no more supple savagery of the pathan in the market place, the bowed reverence of the Mussulman praying in the sunset, the early morning mists lifting among the domes and palms of the city” (310). Helen has acquired a sense of very strong irritation for the Aryan community.

The narrator also tells that Helen hardly mentioned about her interactions with the natives to her mother back home, who, however was of the opinion that Helen must be doing some good for the native civilization. George Woodcock in “The Changing Masks of Empire” states that, “for the English in India, conformity was self-defense” (214) and therefore towards the end we encounter a totally changed Helen who has given up every idea from her mind and has kept herself with in the set standards of a typical English Memsahib.

To conclude the chapter it may be inevitably stated that the novel no doubt deals with the life of English community and their hypocrisies but the irony and the criticism which should have been strongly presented is not there. The natives who actually were
colonized are hardly portrayed whereas the English community has been presented as the one being colonized within the empire. Thus discourse played its significant role to mould the thinking capacity of the author who altered everything according to the prevalent norms.