Philip Meadows Taylor's *Seeta* is an Oriental Romance. Taylor's text is set in the context of the 1857 Revolt. This chapter attempts to read Taylor's novel as an Orientalist text where human relationships are irretrievably enmeshed in the political events of the time.

I

Seeta is the wife of Huree Das, a prosperous businessman of Noorpoor. Huree Dass is killed in a robbery engineered by his cousin Ram Dass. The robber Azrael Pande is a Brahmin dacoit leader. The case is tried by the acting Deputy Commissioner of Noorpoor—Cyril Brandon. At the trial Brandon is impressed by Seeta's calm beauty. Brandon himself is worshipped by the natives for his uprightness and compassion.

Azrael Pande, an absconder from the Army, is convicted but escapes before the hanging. Nawab Dil Khan of Fatehpur helps Pande escape and even provides refuge to the fugitive. Pande swears revenge on Seeta for his troubles.

Pande attacks Seeta's home, presently the house of a priest, Wamun Bhut. Brandon receives information of the
impending attack and rushes there. Seeta is rescued in time. However, Seeta's son dies and Brandon is injured in the course of the rescue. Seeta nurses him back to health.

Brandon wishes to marry Seeta. Seeta in the course of her nursing also falls in love with Brandon. Brandon approaches Seeta's grandfather Narendra to request permission for the marriage. But being a Brahmin, her marriage, even though she is widowed, remains binding on her.

A scandal breaks out regarding Brandon and Seeta. Azrael Pande uses this as a lever to instigate people to rebel against the English.

The English ladies, scared of Brandon's impending marriage to a native, try to poison Seeta's mind against him. She is led to suspect an affair between Brandon and Grace Mostyn. There is also official displeasure at Brandon's deed. However he refuses to abandon Seeta.


The Brandon-Seeta "affair" goes on against this troubled backdrop. Brandon's relationship with a native at a time when the native-ruler equation is in jeopardy is thus a liaison of crisis, in more than one way. Seeta begins to
develop a preference for Christianity.

The Mutiny breaks out. Pande miraculously escapes the British onslaught. The rebellion is crushed and the British recapture Delhi. Pande and the rebels go into hiding in order to recoup their strength. The British manage to survive, though a lot of ill-feeling is generated against the native. In the midst of such conditions of mutual distrust and hate Grace Mostyn and Seeta become friends. Grace and her mother, Mrs. Mostyn, are Seeta's only English friends.

The English celebrate their victory. The rebels attack the house where the festivities are in progress. Seeta dies protecting Brandon. Brandon returns to England and weds Grace Mostyn.

II

Seeta illustrates the numerous Orientalist structures of thought during the Raj. Its relationships and characterisation offer its readers a miscegenated liaison, but with definite Imperialist overtones.

Cyril Brandon's relationship with Seeta begins under professional circumstances. Seeta is presenting her testimony at Azrael Pande's trial and Cyril Brandon is the acting Deputy Commissioner (59-60).
Brandon first "meets" Seeta through her handwriting. Her writing was "very delicate and beautiful, he [Brandon] had never seen such before, and he marvelled that a woman could have written them" (60, emphasis mine). We are thus already in the midst of the Orientalist conception of the native as a delicate, if beautiful person, whose very handwriting reflects fragility.

Brandon is also told that she is "a strange girl" which raises his curiosity (60). His first impressions are of a beauty with "large dewy eyes ... soft and pleading ... of that clear dark brown which like a dog's, is always so loving and true" (60, emphasis mine). Such a beauty belongs, Brandon remembers, to "Titian's pictures" (61).

Thus the relationship is heralded by images of native weakness, beauty, helplessness and a "framed" glamour. Brandon sympathises with Seeta's enforced widowhood, her injuries and her orphaned son. He praises her strength and emotional certitude in the court as she recalls the traumatic dacoity.

Seeta's own initiation into the relationship begins through hearsay. She had "often heard" that Brandon was "courteous and just" and "harmed no one". Just as Brandon's curiosity has been aroused by her handwriting, Seeta wishes
to meet the man of whom such paens are sung. She hopes:
"Surely he [Brandon] would do justice and help a widow and
her child! If she were excited at the thought of appearing in
an open court, she concealed it..." (59).

The relationship's essential features are thus given
to us at the very outset. The native would be weak,
vulnerable and true. The Westerner would be kind, just, and
protective towards her.

When Brandon first sees Seeta, his sight is thus
predisposed to view her in a certain light. His gaze,
motivated by curiosity, is a quasi-scientific one. And he
finds that her complexion is comparable to any Western woman
(61). He notes Seeta's features. The description is truly
Orientalist:

He could not see much of Seeta's figure; but the
small, graceful head, the rounded arm, the tiny foot,
the graceful movement of the neck, and her springy
step as she had entered.... (61, emphasis mine)

The emphasis, therefore is on Seeta's smallness, fragility
and softness. Appropriately, then, Brandon offers
protection to this delicate person: "fear not, you are under
the protection of the law, and no one can harm you" (62).
The law here is epitomised in Brandon. The offer is thus
also a personal guarantee. Thus the non-ontological entity of doctrines and cause are given existence in the Being of the Englishman. Brandon thus sets a personal example, as an individual, for the Imperialist doctrine of protectionism.\(^2\)

The protector role is thus donned by Brandon. Naturally, then, he refers to her as "pet", "little wife" or "little one". Brandon has the power to make her happy and give her a new life. For Seeta, with her husband and child dead there was "no other vent or object for her love" (115). Thus the attitude of protection (of Brandon) finds its origin in his ability and power to extend it.

The power Brandon possesses may be termed "epistemic power", following Peter Morriss in *Power: A Philosophical Analysis* (1987). This power requires knowledge to choose and execute correctly. To take the right decision, and implement it the situation or problem must be first studied (Morriss: 53-4). In *Seeta*, Brandon's extension of protection occurs precisely because he has studied Seeta's problem. Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1985) has demonstrated how power in Imperialism is a direct aftermath of the knowledge first cultivated by Orientalists. Brandon's power over Seeta obviously proceeds from his knowledge regarding her and his convenient official status. Their relationship is only a personal example of the larger games of Empire.
It may be argued, following Mannoni in *Prospero* and *Caliban*, that such a situation of power play was essential for the coloniser. Mannoni argues that the coloniser went out to the colonies because he had no scope for success in England. He also possessed a strong inferiority complex as a result. Out in the colonies he could assert himself over docile natives and attain some self-confidence (Mannoni: 86). Mannoni’s view is admirably illustrated in *Seeta*. Brandon finds that "in England there appeared to be no chance of distinction except by a lifelong strife" (67). In the colony this Britisher finds the chance to move ahead.

The dependence of the native upon the Westerner becomes necessary for the coloniser's ego. The "dependency complex" takes on a paternalistic role as the coloniser becomes the "ma-baap" to the child-native (Mannoni: 69).

Here the child is Seeta and is referred to as such by the "parent" Brandon. She is "child like", who, while being ignorant is also willing to learn. Thus a second level of dependency, that of student upon teacher, is also established. Such a dependency makes the native very loyal (Nandy: 15-16). Brandon thus makes Seeta a disciple child, and their relationship proceeds on this note.

Brandon now wishes to "educate" Seeta. Inspite of
being a devout Christian he had gone through the "tedious ceremonials of a Hindoo Marriage", "suffering" the dresses, fireworks and colour (132). Brandon is also an expert on such Hindu rituals, laws and customs. From this knowledge, emerges a desire to change and improve such "disturbing" facets of Indian life. The Indian (Seeta) is an amusement provoking interest in the exotic. Hence "rare", "strange" and "interesting" are epithets frequently used to describe Seeta in Taylor's novel.

Brandon therefore hopes that Seeta would eventually see the "true light": "How often he had prayed that such should be vouchsafed to her!" (273). Seeta's education consists, obviously, in her turning to Christianity. Now the Bible "comforted Cher] more than the Bhagwat Geeta" (273). As "reward" for her painstaking education, Brandon's love was provided to her. Ashis Nandy has argued that colonialism also worked a system of punishments and rewards. The native is rewarded for his loyalty with the Westerner's protection or love. The native thus makes an effort to win the Western master's approval (Nandy: 3). The old soldier in Kim is also a good example, as we shall see in the chapter on Kipling. This is illustrated in the Brandon - Seeta relationship of teacher - pupil. Seeta who is "simple in regard to all temporal matters" (373) is brought to "a knowledge of the truth" (284).
The native requires education since s/he has been brought up on a wrong diet of Romantic fantasies. In *Seeta*, the heroine has wide learning. However her knowledge is restricted to love-poetry and classic tales of wifely devotion (such as "Satyawan and Savithri"). This aspect of Seeta's learning influences her relationship with Brandon. Her interest is "the poet's love" (51) and such affections as inspired by poetry influences her dependency on Brandon. She wants him to love her the way it is depicted in books:

Seeta had never loved. She had held her husband Churee Dass in respect. She was even proud of him, and he was fond of her - she was his darling! But that was not the love of books.... (51)

Brandon notices her tendency towards such bookish dramatisation. At the trial he notes her dramatic gestures and feels: "such a scene might be told in a romance" (65). Seeta complains about her marriage:

His Churee Dass's love was with his Trade and his money ... I never heard of love; I read of it in my books ... Do you remember the play of Malati and Mahdava? That is all love, you know; and it is so beautiful! I can understand it now. (155)

She admires Savitri, the mythological heroine of Hindu
tradition. This legendary Savitri had successfully pleaded with the God of death for the return of her dead husband, Satyawan. Savitri is thus a symbol of wifely devotion for the Hindus. Seeta frequently tells Brandon that she would die without him. Her final martyrdom is thus also quite on the lines of Romances. She had wished often enough that she could give up her life for Brandon. "It is as I wished only to die - for Cyril! - my lord", she exclaims while dying (381).

Brandon's initial feeling towards Seeta is of sympathy, more than anything else. There is curiosity, as provoked by an exotic object, but not love. One notes that his early offer to Seeta is not of marriage. He hopes she would just "live with him". The narrator remarks that this attitude was inspired by the notion of the "immoral" native. Taylor writes:

I think he felt certain that she would come; and, perhaps, with the common estimate of Hindoo character which too generally prevails, he did not give the girl credit for higher motives of honour and self respect which might influence her. (113)

Brandon then wants her as a mistress or "bibi", as it was then known. The question of a more permanent relationship is not raised.
The implications of having a native mistress were different around the 1850s. Previously such a liaison would not have provoked reprimands from senior British officials. But during Taylor's age things had altered.

Kenneth Ballhatchet in Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj points out that by the latter half of the nineteenth century such interracial liaisons were frowned upon. As late as 1881, English officers were denied promotion if they had Indian mistresses (Ballhatchet: 146-7). Brandon's promotion to Deputy Commissioner is on hold. His struggles of conscience as depicted by Taylor (115-6) are probably more about official consequences than any moral crisis.

After his wedding Brandon earns the disapproval of his relatives, acquaintances and colleagues. He receives a communique from the official who had advocated his confirmation as Deputy Commissioner. The communique informs Brandon that he has "not only set our [the English] laws of morality at defiance, but violated those of the natives who have been entrusted to your care" (238). He is also threatened with dismissal for his native connection.

This reprimand comes at a crucial juncture for Brandon. He has been introduced to the "ideal" English beauty, Grace Mostyn. He is also under pressure from the
social circle where the English women, except the Mostyns, detest the "alien presence" in their midst. The views expressed by the English society in Taylor's novel expresses the conditions back in England. Mrs. Smith deplores the lapse of old English morality: "and that's what people bring from England with them, where we know society is growing most immoral" (167). Brandon could have wedded a more suitable girl like Grace Mostyn whose face was "without a shade of guile about it" (170). This fact strikes Brandon too:

It would be a connection which he could show in England and among his countrymen here with pride, and without a moment's apprehension.... (240)

There are other related factors to be noted about Brandon's dilemma. It was not merely a distrust of natives which fuelled such anti-miscegenation attitudes. Brandon had deprived an English girl of a husband when he wedded Seeta. Trevor May in An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760 - 1970 provides interesting statistics which help us view Taylor's text differently. The number of marriageable women in England rose from 2,765,000 in 1851 to 3,228,700 in 1871 (Seeta was written in 1872). By 1871 two-thirds of all women between twenty and twenty-four were single and 30% of those between twenty-four and thirty-five
(May: 261-62). By the time of Taylor's novel more English women were arriving in India. There was thus a "surplus women" question which probably informs Brandon's problems and those of the other English people with his wedding.

Mrs. Smith's comments regarding the "immorality" of the English can also be seen in the context of England's condition of the time. Trevor May informs us that one of the allegations levelled against industrialisation was that it had destroyed the worker's family. Sexual morality had been affected and unmarried factory girls were encouraged by mill life into sexual immorality. They neglected more "womanly chores" like housewifery (May: 58-60). Mrs. Smith's remark suggests that if the English society back home was degenerating, then it was the duty of those in the colonies to hold up the remnants of their glorious tradition of ethics, morality and decorum. Brandon through his marriage had gone the way of the English society, by behaving like its lower classes. Cyril Brandon, one recalls is of aristocratic background, and as such his lower class misbehaviour becomes abominable and inexcusable. The common soldiery, as Ballhatchet points out, were allowed, even encouraged, to have sexual relations with native women. This was a "safeguard" to preserve their strength and vigour, and to prevent "perversions" like homosexuality. However
officers had to "prove" their masculinity by abstinence, or by marriage to English women (Ballhatchet: 2, 14).

Brandon does not abandon Seeta inspite of such opposition. This is also an illustration of the "true blooded" Englishman who is faithful to his love. It resembles Herbert Compton's character in Taylor's other novel Tippoo Sultaun. Even so, Brandon is "distracted" by Grace Mostyn's presence to "shut out for the time poor little Seeta and her claims on his love and protection" (240). Eventually Brandon's finer instincts prevail and he remains Seeta's husband - protector.

Seeta is by now completely dependent upon Brandon. Her Aunt Ella and grandfather Narendra have been forced to shun her due to ostracisation by the Hindu society (263-66). Her slow conversion to Christianity signals her submission to Western ways, just when her "Indianness" begins to prove detrimental.

The conversion is a practical move by Seeta to sidestep the problems that ostracisation entails for her. This move reinforces her image of a child-like person with a streak of wisdom. A good illustration is her insistence that her infant son should light Huree Dass's pyre so that he may claim the hereditary rights (43). By turning Christian, Seeta hopes to
be better amalgamated into society. Her intention to visit
the Church is thus greeted with joy by other English women:

Dear old Mrs. Pratt and Mrs. Mostyn and Grace said
Seeta should sit with them ... they felt the girl's
high aims of gratitude and love in all their force, and
were content to wait their effects. (257, emphasis mine)

Seeta's conversion is construed as a sign of gratitude for
Brandon's noble act in marrying her.

Thus Seeta's relationships undergo subtle but definite
changes. There is improvement in her camaraderie with the
English society. She also moves up in Brandon's esteem.
Religion is therefore a major factor in miscegenation. The
ancient Western prejudice against the barbarity of Hinduism
(as we have noted in the previous chapter) is an obstacle to
a better relationship. However, conversion to Christianity is
also not a guarantee of success in miscegenation. This is
suggested by the manner in which Taylor escapes exploring the
possibilities of such a liaison.

The Brandon - Seeta relationship runs alongside other
such intercultural "encounters". These other relationships
and characters in the novel provide the textual dimension of
a few thematic preoccupations of the post. - 1857 English
mind.
Narendra, Brandon's senior by many years, prostrates before him. Aunt Ella, who regards Brandon as her son, accepts orders from him. This version of "agelessness" proceeds from the institutionalisation of the person. Brandon is not just "Brandon" - the individual, but also the King, the local manifestation of the Monarch. The social order of the place automatically places the white man at the top as the "recognisable authority" (Skillen: 102-6). Thus Brandon is established as a King in his official and personal capacities.

Yet this "placing" does not imply complete native acquiescence. There is a grain of resentment against coercive British policies. Narendra, Aunt Ella and Baba Sahib also evince a distrust of English morals. This is illustrated by their doubts over Brandon's intentions towards Seeta. Aunt Ella actually accuses him of seducing Seeta (120). Baba Sahib is fearful of his master's (Brandon's) misalliance (122). Narendra finds that while the English are "in the main just" they are also very greedy (30).

Such dissidence is effectively overcome in colonialism. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) argues that European colonialism worked with this kind of "consented hegemony". Said writes:
For its self image it was best if native subjects express assent to the outsider's knowledge and power, implicity accepting Western judgements (180).  

A simple oral assurance from Brandon is sufficient "proof" of his virtues. Aunt Ella then blesses him for his goodness (121). Brandon tells Narendra "I will not fail. Many men among us have done the same, and I am no better than they". Narendra responds "earnestly": "I need no further proof of your high principles" (130). This almost naive and easy acceptance of the Westerner and his sincerity illustrates Said's argument of the coloniser's hegemonic control.

However all voices do not get submerged. The fear and suspicion of the English was a gradual development in Indian attitudes. From the early acceptance to eventual resistance there was a progression. This "progress" was simultaneous with and perhaps also a result of the changing English attitudes themselves. From the demi-God status accorded to them by the Indians they were now (in the 1870s) perceived as mercenaries. Azrael Pande the robber - mutineer in Seeta voices this change of opinion. Initially the cries of "Jey Ganga Mata" had been followed by "Jey Koompanee Bahadoor". Pande describes the change this way:

With such cries our fathers went to battle and won a
thousand victories. But that is past. The Koompanee is not as it used to be, it is no longer an incarnation of our gods. It has changed into a mean cheating robber ... They were our fathers and our mothers. But now?
(147 - 8)

Thus by the 1860s and '70s "much of the gaiety was leaving the empire, also the easy amateurism..." (Morris, Command: 273). There was a more serious and professional tone in British Imperialism, as Morris's quote suggests. The last decades of the nineteenth century was marked by rapid expansion. This was the "New Imperialism" with its rapid expansionist policy. This meant grabbing more land by deposing native rulers. Azrael Pande points this out in Seeta. Pande's comments provide the textual co-relative to the 1833 Charter (renewed in 1860) which enabled any natural-born subject of the Crown to acquire and hold lands in India (Ilbert: 89-91).

There was also a religious dimension to the "New Imperialism". Azrael Pande's speech mentions that "the order is gone out from the new lord Sahib that all Hindoos must become Christians..." (148). He refers to the evils wrought by British laws on Hindu traditions. Pande specifically mentions the widow remarriage proposals of Bentinck. Pande's final instigation to battle and rebellion is through
reference to the forcible use of fat smeared cartridges by
the sepoys. Pande points out that such cartridges "pollute"
the native (150-1). Pande's attack is however not completely
untrue. Ainslie T. Embree in India in 1857 (1987) notes that
by the mid-eighneenth century everything in India had been
changed - "laws and manners, customs and usages, political
organisations, the tenure of property, the religion of the
people..." (13). The extent of British influence on all
aspects of the Indian's life is obvious from Embree's
description. Thus Pande's vituperative rhetoric was referring
to such cataclysmic changes in India.

The problem of the cartridges has an interesting angle.
Most legislation for India was first debated in the British
Parliament. However this particular issue was not raised in
the Parliament. Daniel Headrick in The Tools of Empire
informs us that the Minnie and Enfield rifles, appearing in
1848 and 1853 respectively, were first tested in the
colonies. The Enfield actually became well known, through
notoriety, by its association with the Mutiny (88-92).
Obviously, the English had not accounted for the native
response. This oversight may have originated in the self
confidence that marked the "New Imperialism". The
relationships of this age also, therefore, reflect a certain
callousness and lack of compassion.
Taylor's villain in Seeta is a Brahmin - Azrael Pande. The Brahmin, traditionally of the priestly class, is here cast in a new role. Udayon Misra has noted that in both Tara and Seeta the villain is a Brahmin - Moro Trimmul in Tara and Azrael Pande in Seeta (Misra: 98). Azrael Pande is also powerfully built and has "the expression of a wild beast" (4). The "twice-born" and "pure" Brahmin is here the embodiment of evil. The concept of the Brahmin's "twice-born" status is also played upon by Taylor. Azrael Pande has two re-births: he escapes hanging and later survives a major injury.

The heroine Seeta is a "soodra", a "lower" caste in the Indian hierarchy. Her remarriage is acceptable even by Hindu norms on account of her "lower" caste status. Taylor here combines two conflicting views of the native. These are the "Victorian norm of the tractable mild Hindu ... [and] ... the cruel scheming Oriental who needed and only respected strong government" (Bolt: 178). The "mild" Brahmin in Seeta is evil. The heroine Seeta is an aberration. She is as fair as a Westerner, is learned, does not veil her face, remarries, and as a final blasphemous act, takes to Christianity.

The other Taylor villains in Seeta are fundamentalists. The Muslim "equivalent" of Pande is a Maulvi (i.e., a
priest). Pande himself is patronised by Nawab Dil Khan and befriended by Ram Dass. This Nawab is enamoured of Seeta and hopes to obtain her through Pande's help (76, 309-11). The Hindu - Muslim nexus in Seeta thus portrayed as evil. This alliance actually triggers the revolt. The portrayal of this relationship between the natives suggests a textual "divide and rule" by Taylor. This depiction, along with the portrayal of the Dass family's internal feuds, all sorted out by the Christian Brandon, points to an Imperialist doctrine. Taylor suggests that the Indian social order could not preserve itself without Christian, Western help. This was a "traditional" Raj doctrine. Taylor is here articulating a belief widely held by the British. The Indian society which was disunited and scattered could be brought together only under the single umbrella of British rule and Christianity.

III

Seeta's relationship with Brandon is thus in the midst of myriad complexities. The dependency - protection, ignorance - enlightenment, paganism - Christianity, feminine - masculine oppositions all configure their liaison.

Yet Taylor does not allow the miscegenated attachment to continue. Having displayed his Imperialist bias through his portrayal of relationships and characters, he refuses to
allow a successful interracial marriage. G.S. Amur has commented that Taylor's resolution of the *miscegenated* alliance appears "a little too facile and Utopian" (Amur: 1-2). Udayon Misra defends this conclusion of *Seeta* with the argument that Taylor's "primary aim was the exploration of human *relationships* and he was not obsessed with finding solutions to racial and cultural problems" (Misra: 101). However, Misra ignores the fact that Taylor is refusing the relationship any chance of success.

*Seeta's* death, anticipated in a prophetic snapping of her garland at the "wishing waterfall" (243), is a convenient device to end the relationship. Taylor's text suggests only a temporary attachment between races. And in the course of even such a temporary relationship the native has to be feminine and/or child-like, vulnerable, faithful or dog-like, as *Seeta's* eyes are described, ignorant and a willing convert to *Christianity*. Even so, no prolonged relationship is possible. The native ultimately sacrifices her *life*, desires and *dreams* to the benefit of her Lord and *King*.

Taylor's text is thus wholly Orientalist. We have seen how *relationships* in the novel unambiguously cast the Westerner as supreme. It also shows the inherent "*divisiveness*" of Indian society which necessitated Western presence. Taylor's novel is a good example of a truly
Imperialist text. Though he has portrayed a *miscigenated* relationship he refuses to carry it further. The suggestion of *miscgenation* as aberration of both the Indian and English psyche, is also our starting point for reading Maud Diver's novel, which takes the "possibility" of *miscgenation* a little further.
NOTES

1. Edmund Burke had referred to the natives as soft and effeminate (113). This was to be a characteristic portrayal through all Anglo-Indian writing. The binary opposition being set up was thus obviously that of the delicate, feminine native versus the strong masculine Westerner.

2. Kathryn Tidrick in Empire and the English Character has pointed out that during the Raj the concept of authority was rooted in an evangelical cult of personal example (3).

3. Brandon had initially wanted to paint Seeta (114). It suggests an attempt to capture and frame her for study, analysis and interpretation. This is an almost exact anticipation of Nevil Sinclair's opening gambit in his "conquest" of Lilamani in Maud Diver's novel.

4. Writers like William Jones had detected in the literature of the Orient, features of feminine weakness, vulnerability and the "softer passions" (Jones 10: 346). This was not, in Western eyes, true education.

5. Edward Said in his Culture and Imperialism (1994) has also made a similar point. Said says that the domestic order was tied to, located in, even illuminated by a specifically English order abroad (90).
6. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1977) argues on similar lines. He says: "In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values" (33-34). The native thus accepts and enhances the Imperialist values for himself and the Westerner.