INTRODUCTION

The Canadian quest for identity has been and still is a major concern of
Canadian literati. Till it got Confederation status in 1867, Canada was a
British Colony. Since the majority of the early settlers were of British
origin, English-Canadian literature, culture and outlook banked heavily on
British themes, customs and concerns. The new reality could not erase the
colonial mentality; links with the mother country co-existed with the desire
to project a distinct national identity. This pull in opposite directions
created a unique and piquant situation in Canadian literature. In the
absence of a distinct Canadian culture, a Canadian identity appeared a
confusing and slippery proposition. Commenting on the relationship
between a nation and its literature, Birbalsingh writes: "That there is a
thriving American literature is largely due to a thriving American national
consciousness, visible in a distinctly American outlook, culture and general
way of life. By the same argument, the anonymity of Canadian literature is
in no small part due to the anonymity of the Canadian national
identity"(1972:31-32). This anonymity emerges from a lack of self-
confidence among the Canadians as a people. This lack of self-confidence,
which is a direct consequence of the colonial outlook is noted by Margaret
Laurence too when she states that for long have the Canadians valued
themselves insufficiently, living as they did under the shadows of two
dominating forces, the U.S. and Britannia(1976:217). This stance of self-
deprecation and self-negation, the sense of insufficiency and inadequacy has persisted to the present times.

However, Sara Jeannette Duncan is one writer who doesn't fit in this particular canon of Canadian writing. Writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she portrays a distinct Canadian identity without apology, or without being unduly defensive. She projects the Canadian identity to be not only different from that of the British and the American, but also as superior to both. Her search for the Canadian identity was short and simplistic. Although, to some extent, she succumbs to the ambivalent outlook prevalent in the contemporary Canadian culture, she extricates herself ultimately to paint Canada in glorious colours in her two Canadian novels, *The Imperialist* and *Cousin Cinderella*.

These two novels, however, constitute only a small part of her literary effort. An unfortunate aspect of Duncan's career is her being excluded from a place in the British, the Indian or even the Canadian literature. Canadian critics Claude Bissell, "Introduction to *The Imperialist*" (1971); Lionel Stevenson, *Appraisals of Canadian Literature* (1926) and Thomas Tausky, *Novelist of Empire* (1980), conclude that Duncan's works can not be called Canadian literature. One novel set in Canada and another having a Canadian theme is not really sufficient to call a writer a Canadian, though she may have been born in Canada. Canadian concerns reign supreme only in her early journalistic writings. After Duncan's marriage with Everard Cotes in 1890, she migrated to India. The
The majority of her novels are divided between the international and the Anglo-Indian themes.

Misao Dean (1982) takes cudgels on behalf of Duncan when she maintains that the exclusion of Duncan's work from the canon of Canadian literature is based in part on a narrow definition of the term 'Canadian'. Dean maintains that Canadian literature perhaps should not be defined by setting alone, but by the author's 'view point'. Duncan's willingness to see the Canadian personality as the norm certainly makes her a part of the Canadian literary tradition.

Dean objects to Duncan being excluded from the Canadian canon, while George Woodcock (1983) laments that Duncan is not included in the genre of Anglo-Indian writings even when a major portion of her work deals with Anglo-India. It is peculiar that critics like Greenberger (1969) and Parry (1972) fail to include Duncan in their authoritative studies of Anglo-Indian writings. Duncan's claim has been ignored perhaps because she was an outsider. For an analysis of British India, why should some one pick on a Canadian? If Duncan had projected a different reality, had presented a fresh point of view, notice would have been taken of her. Still, it is unfair to exclude Duncan from these two literary streams. In fact, as will be proved in this study of Duncan, she belongs to both.

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Duncan started her writing career as a journalist in Canada. With a friend Lily Lewis, she embarked on a world tour in September 1888. This tour produced two books. *A Social Departure*(1890), Duncan's first, is a compilation of her despatches to the Montreal *Star* and other newspapers, and it gives an account of her world travels. *An American Girl in London*(1891) emerged out of her stay in England at the end of the tour. This stay produced another book, *Two Girls on a Barge*(1891), another travel adventure, a very slight work describing a trip in a boat. Duncan migrated to India in December 1890, and her first Indian book *Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* appeared in 1893.

One can discern a pattern emerging out of her first three books written before settling down in India. All three can be termed as travelogues, which show intrepid women out to win the world, going around fearlessly, with full freedom and showing high spirit of adventure. Once Duncan migrates to India, things change. She has to negotiate a new world; she is not as breathtakingly free as the protagonists of the first three books suggest. India turns out to be a land of conventions and restrictions, 'a land of regrets'. The constraints of native India and the straight-jacket of Anglo-India clip the fluttering wings of this butterfly. Initially, she was non-plussed. But, very quickly she fits herself into the life pattern of the British living in India. *The Memsahib* shows the transition with a tinge of sadness. Duncan not only adopted the life-style and attitudes of the Anglo-Indians, but also their discourse.
While in India, Duncan wrote nine books set in India, two novels dealing with Canada and Canadians, and five novels dealing with the theme of the Atlantic triangle. Her last three novels were written when she had left India and settled in England. The fact that the Canadian Duncan wrote only two Canadian novels and nine books that deal with India goes to prove that India loomed large on her imagination. This is understandable as the best part of her writing career was spent in India, where she wrote sixteen out of her twenty-two books. There is a consistent pattern that emerges out of her works written during her stay in India. She is critical of Britain as it is a spent force and has nothing to offer to the world except history and tradition. Consequently the British suffer in comparison to the Canadians. She is also critical of the artificiality and the formality of their existence in India. However, she jumps to their defence when they face any problems vis-a-vis the Indians. Duncan reserves her praise for the Anglo-Indian community who weather all the storms in India, yet are misunderstood in England. Whenever the British are compared with the Canadians, they come out as second best. However, compared to Indians, they emerge as far superior. She is not enamoured of the British in England, but becomes their staunch defender in India. Another pattern that emerges out of her Anglo-Indian writing is the hardening of her stance against India. The belief that the Anglo-Indians can do no wrong whereas the Indians can do nothing right gives ample proof of this attitude.

This celebration of the British along with the criticism of their rigidity and inflexibility suggests that Duncan’s consciousness was vertically
divided. She looks at the Canadian – British relationship with one kind of spectacles, and at the Indo-British relationship with another kind. Her psyche is afflicted with 'Double Vision'. Consequently, she uses double standards: one for Canada and the other for India vis-a-vis England. Her ideas remain fixed; there appears no change in her thinking except towards the fag end of her career. As soon as she left India, around 1914, a unifying pattern is once again discernible. In the last three novels, which incidentally were written around and after the first World War: *His Royal Happiness* (1914), *Title Clear* (1922) and *The Gold Cure* (1924, published posthumously), Duncan is much concerned with the future of Great Britain. The rise of Germany had endangered the existence of Great Britain, so she is forced to seek an alliance between Britain and the U.S. The last three novels, thus, deal with the theme of reconciliation and reunification through marriage alliances between the British and the Americans.

Duncan’s last three novels written after she left India are insubstantial. Did her leaving India deprive her of a solid platform which resulted in a thematic void to set in? From being a very prolific writer, she produced only four novels during the last ten years. Though she did dabble into play - writing (usually rehashing her novels into plays), she did not achieve much success. Tausky (1980) believes that at the end of her career, perhaps she had lost her steam; she had become tired. It is clear that her years in England did not prove fruitful in a literary sense. In a way, her
writing career ended in 1909 with *The Burnt Offering*, her last Anglo-Indian novel.

Duncan came from a provincial background; she was a woman and a colonial. A feeling of deprivation and a sense of marginalization was naturally present in her. The movement from the margin to the centre is a pervasive colonial trait, and is the dream of every colonial. Duncan's decision to marry an Englishman was perhaps a conscious step of getting away from the periphery. In one move, she became a Britisher and moved to the centre of the Empire. Marriage, thus, becomes a tool for engineering social rise both in her life as well as in her works. In her first short visit to India during her world tour, she had seen the grandeur of the Raj. She perhaps became enamoured of its privileges and prospects and decided to partake of these on a permanent basis. But the culture she carried with her, as can be seen from her Anglo-Indian works, was not Canadian; it was that of a white woman. Her thinking, her viewpoint is that of a colonizer. Very soon, she assumed the persona of an Anglo-Indian memsahib, and in the process lost her Canadian identity altogether. Ideologically and materially she had become a Britisher. She spent the last years of her life in England, where she died and was eventually buried.

Her psychological journey took her from Canada to England via India. The gaiety and spirit of her first two books is not captured in her later novels. Obviously, India had transformed her. The spirit of high adventure, the devil-may-care attitude, the deliberately unconventional stance - these traits do not figure in her subsequent works. Her earlier preferences,
predilections and concerns, which she had shown as a journalist as well as a budding novelist do not form a part of her later world-view, which narrows down to the welfare of the Anglo-Indians.

Patricia Morley in *Margaret Laurence* (1981) writes that "Africa was a catalyst and crucible for much of Laurence's work" (44). This can easily be applied to India in the case of Duncan. India too was both a catalyst and crucible in the formation of Duncan's psyche. "Africa cauterized Laurence's youthful naivete and liberal optimism" (45). India too clipped Duncan's wings and brought her down-to-earth when she had to negotiate a puzzlingly different reality. But the similarity of their responses ends here. While Africa taught Laurence to look inwards and helped her gain spiritual maturity, India failed to stir Duncan's conscience and exposed her colonial preferences. Africa also developed Laurence's interest in and sympathy for the native Canadians. India, however, could not impress upon Duncan the need for compassion for natives: both of Canada and India. The phenomenon of imperialism, along with exposure to different cultures, bred in Laurence a "sensitivity to human difference, [and] compassion for alienation and misunderstanding" (45). Duncan negates this validity of the `other' and replaces it with the concept of the prominence of `self' which leads to the development of an attitude of inherent moral and racial superiority towards Indians. This attitude is discernible even in her Canadian fiction. In *The Imperialist*, Duncan totally ignores the French-Canadian problem and the only reference to it is derogatory in nature.
Native Canadians too are treated unsympathetically towards the end of the novel. The almost parallel experiences which surprisingly bring out diametrically opposed responses in these two writers reinforce one of Laurence's intuitions about human outlook that "it was not a matter of intelligence but of viewing the whole of life through different eyes" (1963:80); which can generate either compassion or antipathy.

Not much critical attention has been paid to Duncan. Whatever criticism is available, an inordinately large proportion of it deals with her most Canadian novel *The Imperialist*; a very small segment of this criticism pertains to Duncan's Anglo-Indian works. This study attempts to make an in-depth evaluation of Duncan's works, especially her Anglo-Indian writings in the light of various theories of colonial discourse. A major thrust of Duncan's writings, journalistic and fictional, is to redefine the Canadian scene in the context of colonial influences on socio-cultural milieu. The need for divided loyalty, both to Canada and Great Britain created an ambivalent outlook which is evident in Canadian politics, culture and literature at the end of the nineteenth century. One finds this ambivalent attitude come to the fore more vigorously when Duncan looks, from a nationalistic stance, at the Canadian society on the one hand and the Indian society on the other, during the colonial period of both the countries. The ideal for both is the same: to shed colonial status and achieve self-government. Canada, according to Duncan, is fit for freedom, whereas India still has to languish in bondage. The themes of imperialism and nationalism are dealt with in her Canadian and Anglo-Indian writings. Her
Canadian fiction establishes the supremacy of Duncan's nationalism over imperialism, whereas, in relation to India, it is her imperialism that triumphs over nationalism, thus giving birth to "Double Vision". The pride of her race prejudiced her imagination to an extent that Duncan's representation of India becomes stereotyped and superficial. Her exclusive concern for the life of the Anglo-Indians, her suspicion of anything remotely hinting trouble for the British-Raj in India, transforms her into being a mere propagandist of the Empire. But her role as a propagandist proves artistically damaging. The consequent confusion and uncertainties that mark the handling of plot and theme in her novels puts a question mark on Duncan's achievement as a novelist.

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On Duncan's Trail in India

Not much is known about Duncan's life in India. She did not write any autobiography and hardly any private correspondence is available. Nowhere is Duncan's life documented, except in her biography Redney, by Marian Fowler. Unfortunately, Redney is based more on Duncan's fiction than on Duncan's life. My search for information on Duncan's life in India did not prove very successful. In Calcutta, The National Library, the Asiatic Society Library, the Indian Museum Library and the Victoria Memorial Library did not yield any documents which could shed some light on Duncan's stay in Calcutta. The
search in the State Archives and the Secretariat Library, Simla, proved equally futile. However, I was able to locate some of the residences where Duncan lived while in India.

Duncan came to India in December 1890 to get married to Everard Cotes, Assistant to the Superintendent, Indian Museum, Calcutta. The first house she lived in was at 1, Sudder Street, behind the Museum, which, at that time, housed several staff members of the Museum. The building used to house the Revenue Board offices before its takeover by the Museum.

Picture 3 (Appendix) is a sketch of this building, done around 1840 by a British artist Charles D'oyly. The pond seen in the picture was called 'Jhanjari Talao', (The pond of the anklets), and was used by Indians to draw water. The original owner of the building, Peter Speke, had built a cement boundary cum grill on the edge of the pond in order to keep off the Indians from dirtying the water. The Indians were allowed to use only the small corner, as shown in the picture, to bathe and fill water.

1, Sudder Street now houses the administrative offices of the Indian Museum. Dr. Shymalkanti Chakravarti, Deputy Director of the Museum, who has his office in the building was kind enough to take me around the complex in search of `curved rafters' and `sloping doors' as pointed out by Duncan. The interiors having undergone repeated renovations, it was not possible to locate the original apartment in which Duncan lived and which she described in her novel *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib*. However, the pond had vanished by the time Duncan came to live there, replaced perhaps by what she termed as "enough space for a tennis court and a garden." St. Thomas' Church, where
Duncan got married, still exists on Free School Street, very close to 1, Sudder Street. It is a very simple building, sans any architectural grandeur and is painted uniformly in yellow.

In the middle of 1897, Duncan left Calcutta and made Simla her residence. Duncan lived in four houses in Simla - Holcombe, Red-Roof, Westonbert and Dormers. I was able to locate three of the four houses. Holcombe (picture 1, Appendix) is the first house Duncan purchased in Simla. It is situated on Chaura Maidan, close to Cecil Hotel. It is an impressive two storeyed structure, open on three sides with a hillock on the South side. The forest on the North and West side continues up to Red-Roof, the house Duncan shifted to after leaving Holcombe. The area broadens up after a comparatively narrow entrance. A small oblong garden patch is situated in the front. After getting an attack of tuberculosis, it was in this garden that Duncan spent one year (1990) writing *On the Other Side of the Latch*. The interior of the house does not match the description given in *Redney*, for the drawing room with latticed windows and carved book cases, as well as the steps from the Music room holding pots of flowers and going up to the window do not exist now. The Japanese plum trees and Canadian goldenrods are also missing. It is a big house having two big halls, five big rooms with attached bath and dressing rooms and also having twelve outhouses at the back side. At present, it is occupied by a Lt. Colonel of the Indian Army.

Red-Roof (Picture 2, Appendix), the house to which Duncan shifted after leaving Holcombe (around 1903), is also located at Chaura Maidan area. It is
ten minutes walk downhill from Holcombe and is situated close to the Glen and Annandale, two picnic spots much favoured by the British. Red-Roof is open on four sides, covered by forests on all the sides. It is also a big two storeyed house having a narrow entrance which later opens up. Two big halls, six big rooms and four small rooms makes up the living area. There is a Tennis court built a little lower down, though not in use now, and sixteen servant quarters. The house was taken over by Himachal Pradesh University in 1971 and was used as the University Guest House till 1976. Now it is being utilized as residence for the University Staff. The present residents of the house stated that from the first ray of the sun to the last, the house is flooded by sunlight. After the tuberculosis attack, Duncan perhaps preferred a house which had enough sunlight to keep the chill away. All the houses around Red-Roof have red roofs, ironically, Red-Roof has natural, tin coloured roof.

Dormers, the house to which Duncan shifted around 1911, is situated at Tara Hall, Kaithu, far away from Chaura Maidan. It houses the offices of the Intelligence Bureau. For reasons of security, I was neither allowed to enter the house, nor permitted to take any photograph.