

**Stereotypical Portrayal of Indian and French in Richard C. Morais' *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2010): An Orientalism Study**

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**ABSTRACT**

Globalization has made understanding of cultural diversity more important. However, one challenge caused by cultural diversity is the existence of cultural stereotypes since stereotyping can lead to prejudice and discrimination. This study attempts to examine the stereotypical portrayals of the Indians and the French in Morais' *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2010) from Orientalism perspective since studies on this work are still limited. This study draws on Said's (1978) theory on Orientalism. In addition, this study also employs Little's (1966) theory on characterization to support the analysis of the data. The finding reveals the author presents Indian and French in a contrast way in which one is regarded as inferior and the other as superior. Furthermore, it is also found that the relation between them is similar to the relations between the Orient and the Occident which are argued by Said (1978) as a kind of relationship which distinguishes 'self' and 'other' that is filled with power and domination.

**Keywords:** *Orientalism, stereotypes, othering, power*

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has made understanding of cultural diversity become more important. Cultural diversity can be interpreted as a condition which consists of people from a different culture in a community. The diversity itself can be seen from race, religion, or any cultural background differences (Knežević, Kulaš, & Duspara, 2009). However, one challenge caused by cultural diversity is the existence of cultural stereotypes. In a diverse society, stereotypes have become a problem because stereotypes are usually based on a set of unexamined judgment about others. In relation to stereotypes about a group of people toward another, Orientalism is a concept which explains a way of seeing Orient from Occident's point of view that is realized through a set of stereotypical images.

In 1978, a post-colonial critic, Edward Wadie Said introduced a concept called Orientalism to refer to a division of the world into two perspectives, namely the 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'. Said (1978) argues that the 'the Orient' refers to

people from the East or thing related to the East, such as Asia and Africa while 'the Occident' refers to Western people or thing related to the West including three great countries at that time; France, America, and England. However, he also argues that these two terms are not only related to a geographical boundary, but it is a construction that is constructed by the Occident. In this case, stereotyping is a way in which the Occident produces and constructs the image of the Orient.

Stereotypes about the Orient and the Occident can also be found in a novel entitled *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. It is a novel written by a Canadian writer, Richard C. Morais, which was published in 2010. The novel tells about the life of three generations of an Indian family, the Haji, with their passion in the culinary world. However, the family has to leave India due to the riot that happens in India. Moving abroad has made the Haji's life experiences more challenging. As an example, in France, they meet Madame Gertrude Mallory, an owner of a famous restaurant named *Le Saule Pleureur*,

who later determines Hassan's career as an immigrant chef. However, far from his expectations, the Haji's dream to open an Indian restaurant in France turns out to face many obstacles because of Mallory. Opening a new restaurant as what he did in his homeland is not as easy as he imagined before.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Departing from theory of Orientalism proposed by Said (1978), this study aims to reveal the portrayal of the Orient and the Occident which can be found in this novel since it presents two contrasting cultures which are Indian and French. The interaction and rivalry between Indian and French contribute to shape the conflict of this story. Besides, literary elements which are character and setting used in this novel also show that these two cultures are portrayed differently. Characterization becomes a way used by the author to portray the differences between Indian and French. For instance, Hasan's family, as the representation of the East, is introduced as a poor family. On the other hand, Mallory's family, as the

representation of the West, is described as opposite to Hassan's family. Therefore, Little's (1966) theory of characterization is also used for this study. In addition, the setting used to depict India and France is also illustrated in a contrasting way. As an example, India is depicted as a dirty, polluted, and crowded place. On the other hand, France is described as a place that is associated with cool, fresh, and beautiful atmosphere. Moreover, the story also shows several issues which are discussed by Said in his book, such as binary opposition, cultural stereotype, othering, and Western domination over the East.

Since this novel has been adapted into a movie, several studies have been conducted to discuss the movie. A study which was conducted by Wahyuni (2017) discussed the issue of social identity and diaspora by exploring how food can construct Hassan's cultural identity. In addition, Sulthan (2016) in his study also found that Hassan's passion in culinary and food leads him to achieve his dream. However, studies which discuss the novel are still

limited. Moreover, there has been no research which addresses the issue of portrayal or Orientalism from the novel. Therefore, this study attempts to find out an interesting issue from this novel which is how the author portrayed Indian and French through the characters and setting presented in this novel.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part explains how the novel portrays the Indians and the French through two literary elements; characterization and setting. Little's (1966) method in analyzing characterization was used to analyze the textual evidence which focuses on how the characters in this novel are portrayed from their physical appearance, personality, social status, and social relations. Moreover, the setting that is used to describe India and France is also considered significant to reveal the portrayals. Therefore, by analyzing its characterization and setting, it is found that the author described these two cultures in a contrasting way.

In the novel, Indian characters are stereotyped with many negative

portrayals. First, in terms of physical appearances, they are portrayed as unattractive. For example, in describing several characters from India, the author of this novel mostly uses negative connotation. The textual evidence and the elaboration are presented below.

**Papa was cursed, ever since he was a teenager, with an unattractive rash of blackheads, pimples, and boils across the broad expanse of his hairy back,** and while Mummy was alive, the duty of popping the worst offenders fell on her (p. 27).

As can be seen from the textual evidence above, it is described that Hassan's father is unattractive. It is mentioned that his physical appearance is ugly by showing that he has blackheads, pimples, and boils all over his face.

The portrayal of Indian as unattractive is contrary to the portrayal of French characters in the novel. As an example, in portraying Margaret Bonnier's character, the author describes her as an attractive woman by illustrating her appearance.

It was my first good look at Margaret Bonnier, Le Saule Pleureur's quiet sous chef. She was clearly just a few years older than myself, and wore a no-nonsense bob of blond hair, just the right length to tuck behind the ears that were rather modishly studded with silver earrings. **Her dark eyes were set deep in pale skin, like pearls inside oyster-sized cheeks red from both the sharp wind and the sturdy. Jura stock that was her genetic makeup.** (p. 45)

She is described as a young woman who has a natural beauty. Her beauty is further emphasized by mentioning that Margaret is like a pearl. This depiction is in line with Malsallez and Senges's opinion (as cited in Rosenthal, 1999) which argues that French women are associated with characteristics like "slender," "very feminine," "sexy," and "classy" (p. 898). Therefore, it is no wonder if Margaret as a French woman is portrayed as in the textual evidence presented above.

Second, in terms of personality, the Indians are portrayed as dependent and incompetent. By analyzing Indian characters' personality, it can be seen that they are dependent to French characters and could not solve their problem alone. In addition, throughout the story, it is also shown that every achievement that is achieved by the Indians are mostly influenced by French characters' role and help.

If I am honest, my rise in Paris over the next twenty years, it was not as difficult as one would suspect. It was as if some unseen spirit were clearing obstacles and helping me take the path that I believe was always destined for me. For I was, as promised, promoted after just two years to the position of premier sous chef, at La Gavroche, that one-star restaurant behind the Élysée Palace. **But here is the great mystery, which I suspect I will never unravel: Was Madame Mallory somehow involved in my steady rise over the following years? Or did I imagine it?** (p. 89).

The textual evidence above proves that the author portrays Hassan as dependent to Mallory. Although it is only Hassan's assumption, it is later explained that it is not a coincidence because Mallory is often involved in many events during Hassan's career journey. It is in line with Said (1978)'s argument that in all possible relationship which is happened between the Orient and the Occident, it will not eliminate the Occident superiority. Thus, although it is told that at the end of the story, Hassan can achieve his success, but it cannot be separated from Mallory's invisible help.

First, Hassan will not get a chance to be a part of French culinary industry, if it is not Mallory who offers him to become her student and learns to become a chef in her restaurant, *Le Saule Pleureur*. Then, Hassan can also achieve his dream to open his own restaurant because of Mallory. Even though she does not admit it directly, but every person which helps him in opening his restaurant is all connected to Mallory. In addition, Hassan's successful career in French culinary industry and

become a famous French chef is influenced by Mallory's acquaintance, Chef Paul Verdun. Moreover, it is also worth noting that what makes Hassan successful in his career is not a curry recipe which he brought from India, but it is a French food that is considered more modern and refined than his own culture. Thus, it is proven that the novel mostly portrays the Indians depends on the French throughout the story. As the Occident, the French hold a very important role in the story.

As mentioned before, the Indians are also portrayed as incompetent. It is shown by explaining that Indian characters who cannot solve their problem alone. Moreover, mostly, they are unable to do the works tasked to them. The textual evidence and elaboration are explained in the following paragraph.

*"Pff,"* said Jean-Pierre. **"Utter disaster. The boy, he's incompetent."** Madame Mallory shook her head in disgust. Like I was hopeless. **"Margaret, vite, take over for Hassan. Do the soufflés again. And you, Hassan, prepare the day's**

**pasta. You will do less harm there.”** I slinked off to the corner of the kitchen to lick my wounds (p. 79).

In the textual evidence above, the author clearly shows that Hassan’s character is depicted as incompetent. During his apprenticeship, he works hard for *Le Saule Pleureur*. He has to wake up earlier, work, and only get a chance to sleep after midnight. However, his efforts remain unrecognized. Hassan is still depicted as an incompetent man.

On the other hand, French characters are portrayed differently by illustrating that they are independent and competent. As an example, Mallory is depicted as a competent woman who can manage her business for years until she achieves the Michelin star. In addition, she is also portrayed as an enthusiastic and perfectionist woman. The following paragraph elaborates the portrayal of the French as competent.

**Over the next decades Mallory diligently applied her first-rate education**

**and stamina for long hours in the kitchen,** building what cognoscenti eventually considered one of France’s finest small country hotels—Le Saule Pleureur. She was a classicist by education and instinct. (p. 32)

From the textual evidence above, it is shown that Mallory is portrayed as someone who is competent in running her business. It can be seen from her persistence in developing *Le Saule Pleureur* after she graduated from her school. Moreover, her competency is also shown by explaining that she achieves her second Michelin star which becomes the symbol of a high-quality restaurant.

In terms of social status, Indian characters are portrayed as backward while French characters are portrayed as civilized. India is depicted as a country with a high level of poverty throughout this novel. Indian characters are mostly described as poor. The characteristic of being poor that is constructed by the author involves the inability to

afford basic needs, such as food, shelter, sanitation, education, etc.

Grandfather never liked to talk about those early days in Bombay, but I know from Ammi, my grandmother, that **he slept rough in the street for many years, earning his living delivering tiffin boxes to the Indians clerks running the back rooms of the British Empire.** (p. 1)

As evidenced above, it can be seen that Hassan's grandfather as an Indian is depicted as a poor man in the story because he cannot fulfill shelter. During British colonialism, he is depicted as a homeless man who has to sleep in the street for a long time. In addition, the author also portrays that the Indians cannot fulfill another basic need which will be elaborated in the following textual evidence.

**My life in the kitchen, in short, starts way back with my grandfather's great hunger.** And that three day ride atop the train, baking in the fierce sun,

clinging for dear life as the hot iron chugged across the plains of India, was the unpromising start of my family's journey. (p. 1)

The textual evidence above proves that Hassan's grandfather has to experience great hunger during his early days due to his inability to afford food as another basic need.

The next sign of Indians backwardness is shown through illustrating the Indians as uneducated. Education is an important aspect of human life. It is included in one of the basic human needs proposed by Townsend (2006). Thus, failure in fulfilling education needs can lead to another problem like poverty.

The point is Papa grew up in an India very different from the one his father knew. **Grandfather was illiterate; Papa attended a local school, not very good, admittedly,** but he still made it to the Institute of Catering Technology, a polytechnic in Ahmedabad. (p. 2)



As shown in the textual evidence above, Hassan's grandfather is described as an illiterate man in the story. Illiteracy is a big problem faced by many countries because it will lead to another serious problem. Illiterate people will face problems like hunger, disorder, humiliation, and even poverty in their life (Thengal, 2013). It is in line with Hassan's grandfather condition because he has to suffer from great hunger and poverty due to his illiteracy. In addition, illiteracy will also hinder people to have a stable job.

They are also portrayed as backward by showing that they are uncivilized. In the textual evidence below, the author tries to show that they are uncivilized through explaining the setting of this story.

I still dream of the place. If you stepped out of the immediate safety of our family compound you stood at the edge of the notorious Napean Sea Road shantytown. It was a sea of roof scraps atop rickety clapboard shacks, all crisscrossed by putrid streams. **From the shantytown**

**rose the pungent smells of charcoal fires and rotting garbage, and the hazy air itself was thick with the roar of roosters and bleating goats and the slap-thud of washing beaten on cement slabs. Here, children and adults shat in the streets (p. 4).**

From the textual evidence above, it is known that the author portrays the Indians backwardness by illustrating that India is polluted, dirty, and disgusting place. It is in line with Ramasubramanian (2005)'s finding that in many films about Indians produced by the Occident, India is always portrayed as a polluted place. It is supported by the presence of garbage, spoiled food, dusty street, and unclean water. This condition reflects the uncivilized behavior of Indians who are not aware of cleanliness. Moreover, the novel also strengthens the stereotype that they are uncivilized by describing their way of life. It is shown that many people from children to adults defecate in the street in India. Open defecation can be a sign of an

uncivilized society and it is not considered as a modern way of life.

On the other hand, French characters are portrayed as civilized through illustrating their way of life. In the story, it is explained that her family background is honored. Her parent is a great hotelier who is quite famous in France. Therefore, since she grew up in a good environment, she is not much different from her family. It is proven by illustrating that her family supports her dream to become a great hotelier by sending her abroad to continue her education.

**At the age of seventeen, Mallory was sent to the best hotel school in Geneva to continue her education,** and it was there she acquired a taste for the rugged mountain range along the French and Swiss border. (p. 32)

From the textual evidence above, it is known that Mallory is a well-educated woman because in her early days, she has a chance to afford the best school for hoteliers in Geneva. Thus, it is no wonder if Mallory is later described as a famous chef and

“a master technician much admired by the other leading chefs of France” (p. 32) because of her educational background. It is in line with Macfie’s (2002) argument that the Occident is often known as developed and rational. Furthermore, the portrayal that the French are well-educated is also supported by various events shown in the story.

In terms of social relations, the author also portrays the Indians as ‘the Other’ for French. The textual evidence and elaboration are presented in the following paragraph.

Jean-Pierre, please, you must understand. **Hassan, he is not like you and me. He is different. You and I, this place is in our blood, and we will both live and die here, in the kitchen of Le Saule Pleureur.** Hassan, he has the makings of a great chef, it is true, and he has talent beyond anything you and I possess. **But he is like a visitor from another planet, and in some ways he is to be pitied,** for the distance he has yet to travel, the hardships he has yet to endure. Believe me. He is not my favorite. You are. (p. 83)

As can be seen from the textual evidence above, the author illustrates a condition where *Le Saule Pleureur's* chef de cuisine, Jean Pierre is angry to Mallory after she praises Hassan's work and says that Hassan's work is better than his. Pierre's anger and jealousy makes Mallory feel uncomfortable, so she convinces him by saying that he is still her favorite and explaining the reason why she gives such praises to Hassan. Her praise for Hassan is nothing compared to what Jean Pierre has achieved. Moreover, it is also explained that Mallory considers Hassan as different from them by saying that "he is a visitor from another planet" which implies that she regards him as 'the Other'. Moreover, as Brons (2015) argues that Othering can form "inferiority and radical alienness to some other or out-group", the same is also reflected in this novel. Since she considers Hassan as other, it makes her think that he is inferior compared to her. It is proven when Mallory states that Hassan needs to be pitied. In addition, there is also other events which show that the French consider the Indians as inferior.

Have you seen what he is doing? **He's turned that beautiful Dufour mansion into a bistro. An India bistro! Horrible. I can smell that oily cooking all up and down the street.** And that placard? *Mais non.* This is not possible. (p. 38)

I don't like what you are doing." "Wah?" **"To our street. I don't like the music, the placard. It's ugly. So unrefined."** I have not often seen my father at a loss for words, but at this remark he looked as if someone had punched him hard in the stomach. **"It's in very bad taste," Mallory continued, brushing an imaginary thread off her sleeve. "You must take it down. That sort of thing is all right in India, but not here.** (p. 40)

The textual evidence above illustrates Mallory's dislike toward the Indians. It is shown in an event when she confronts to Hassan's father and says that she does not like what Hassan's family is doing. Moreover, not only showing that she dislikes the cultures, but she also humiliates him directly

by saying that the cultures are so unrefined. This illustration is in accordance with a study which was conducted by Moosavinia, Niazi, and Ghaforian (2011). It is stated that creating a binary opposition and making others less inferior than self is one point which Said (1978) highlighted in his work. The process of othering is needed by the Occident to strengthen their self-image. Thus, degrading and humiliating the Indians are a way in which the French try to confirm their superiority toward the Indians.

In terms of social relations, the French are also portrayed as the powerful one throughout the story. Many events which are presented in this novel show that one group has more power to dominate others. Therefore, it is in accordance with Said (1978)'s argument who explains that the relation between the Orient and the Occident are always filled with power wrapped in a complex hegemony. Moreover, this argument is supported by Sardar (as cited in Shabanirad & Marandi, 2015)'s opinion who states that "power is an essential ingredient of Orientalism (p.

28). The textual evidence below shows how Mallory exercises power that she has toward Hassan's father.

And another thing. **It is tradition here in Lumière that Madame Mallory has the first choice of the morning's produce.** It's been this way for decades. **As a foreigner, I appreciate you would have no way of knowing this, but now you do."** She offered Papa a wintry smile. "It's very important for newcomers to start off on the right foot, don't you agree? (p. 41)

The textual evidence above illustrates an event in which Mallory is irritated because she thinks that what Hassan's father did is disrespectful. He overtakes her position to buy the first material in the shop. As the local, she thinks that she has more power than Hassan's father. Thus, she reminds him to know his place because foreigner like him does not deserve the same right as the local. This illustration strengthens the opinion

argued by Said (1978) that in every possible relationship between the Orient and the Occident, the Occident will never lose its superiority.

Portraying India and Indian characters as presented above can be misleading and further reinforces the stereotypes which have been attached to India for a long time. Since India and its people are being stereotyped as backward, poor, and illiterate, thus, directly and indirectly, people will perceive that what the media has shown is the accurate picture of India. As Lippmann (1922) argues that stereotype “told about the world before we see it” and “imagine things before we experience them” (p. 90). Therefore, even though people do not know about India and its people in reality, through stereotypes which are shown and spread in media, one can assume and perceive how India and its people are like. While in fact, India is a diverse country where its people have cultural, social, and economic differences. Raj (2015) argues that there are three levels of social structure India namely the urban with its cosmopolitan and advancement, middle-class with its industrialism,

and rural area with its poverty and backwardness. However, the portrayal of Indians that is often found in much popular literature and media are only the rural India that is associated with poverty. In fact, poverty in India has declined since 1990 because from its 1.3 billion population, only five percent of them who are still live in extreme poverty (Slater, 2018). However, the stereotype that India is a poor country remains unchanged.

On the other hand, the finding presented above also shows that France and its people are always portrayed in a positive way throughout the story. In addition, McQueen (2017) states that the image of Paris as a romantic and beautiful city which has been known for a long time is not totally true. In fact, just like other countries in the world, France is also a country with problems; poverty, homelessness, crimes, pollutions can also be found. In the past decade, it is found that poverty in France has increased, especially among young people and single-parent (Mounier, 2018). This problem further leads to social issue,

such as the increasing number of homeless people in France. Since 2001, the number of homeless people has increased by 44%. In 2012, according to a survey by official INSEE, there were 141.500 homeless people in France. However, this different side of France is rarely seen in media when portraying France.

In addition, it is worth-noting that the portrayals presented above are not only intended to depict races which are the Indians and the French, but it can be addressed to particular religion as well. From the beginning of the story, the author shows that Indian characters in the novel are depicted as Muslim. Thus, since Hassan's family is described as Muslim, so the depiction of the Indians presented in the previous section may be directed for Muslim as well. Therefore, as an Indian Muslim family who lives in France, they experienced double minority; both as the Indian and Muslim. By portraying Indian Muslim with the stereotypical images presented above, it reflects how Western view toward Islam also remains unchanged; they are depicted as a second-class citizen. This

supports Hall (1997)'s argument which states that representation is complex since it can involve a multidimensional process and does not only involve one single meaning. In this case, the portrayals presented in this study are addressed to both national and religious identity.

Moreover, it is also worth-noting that the author's identity as a Westerner influences the way he describes Indians and French characters in this novel. Throughout this novel, it is found that he tends to present the Occident cultures in a better way than the Orient. In addition, in the novel, he also uses first-person point of view from Hassan as an Indian. Thus, it is possible that there are differences or misleading portrayals when he describes India and Indian characters since he does not belong to the same culture, but only relies on his knowledge about the culture.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze how the Indians and the French are portrayed in *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2010)

from Orientalism perspective. To answer research question for this study, Little's (1966) method of characterization was used to find out how the Indians and the French are portrayed in the novel. Then, the data were interpreted using Orientalism theory by Edward W. Said (1978) to reveal the meaning from the portrayals of the Indians and the French as the Orient and the Occident from Orientalism perspective.

The findings reveal that the author portrays the Indians and the French in a contrasting way throughout the story. The author portrays the Indians with stereotypical images such as unattractive, dependent, incompetent, and backward. By analyzing their physical appearances, the author is more often described them as unattractive. In terms of their personality, this novel also portrays the Indians as dependent and incompetent. Throughout the story, it is shown that the Indians cannot face their problem alone and need to be helped. Then, they are also portrayed as backward since its people live below the poverty line proven by their inability to fulfill basic needs, such as

food, shelter, sanitation, and education. Moreover, the backwardness can be seen in terms of social condition, they are portrayed as uncivilized proven by illustrating that they are barbaric and their way of life that is still traditional.

On the other hand, the author portrays the French in a positive way and contrary to the portrayals of the Indians. They are portrayed as attractive, independent, competent, and civilized. In the novel, French characters are described as attractive by showing their physical appearances. Moreover, in terms of personality, they are portrayed as competent and independent because they do not need any help from others to achieve their success. In terms of social status, the author describes that they are superior by showing that they are well-educated. Mallory, as a representation of the French in the novel, is described as a wealthy family who can get an opportunity to go to the best school in Switzerland. Last, it is also shown that Indian characters adore the French because they have a better civilization. The setting used to portray France is also

very different to India because France is portrayed as a modern country where much development took place, yet the place is still cool, fresh, and beautiful. Illustrating France as a good place to stay indicating that it has a better civilization.

Besides the contrasting portrayals presented above, the present study

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