

## Reading *Huasipungo* from the Perspective of Universal Moral Values

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### ABSTRACT

The present article explores *Huasipungo* from the idea of universal moral values. Though *Huasipungo*'s acceptance as a pioneer *indigenista* work is indisputable, the fact that the work completely overlooked the indigenous cultural universe has often been criticized. The article aims to explore the novel from the perspective of universal moral values to contest the opinion that the absence of the indigenous cultural universe (often considered as a sign of paternalistic attitude towards the Indians and a bourgeois approach towards looking at the Indian problem) is being insensitive to the indigenous world. The article argues that this absence of indigenous cultural universe is substituted by universal moral values that the author subtly underpins in the novel. It is through the exaltation of these values that the author gives meaning to his work. It is the emphasis on human values shared by people across different cultures, Icaza successfully conveys his concerns about the plights of the *Indios* far and wide and even to the readers disconnected with Latin American social reality. The author emphasizes the universal values to get his point across *i.e.* values recognized across all cultures. It is contended in the present paper that the non-existent cultural universe of the *Indios* is well substituted by the objective criticism (portrayed through conflict and compatibility of values) of the cruel oppression of the *Indios* by the oppressors who hold universal moral values in complete disregard in the post-colonial Latin America.

**Key Words :** *Huasipungo*, Universal moral values

### INTRODUCTION

Cultural relativism is one way of understanding or knowing 'the other'. Often to write about 'the other', relativistic cultural perspectives are used (in order to explain the author's viewpoints and to get certain ideas across). In works wherein 'the other' is the subject of inquiry, cultural relativism is a principle mode to put forth views and opinions. Comparative and relative approaches play an important role. Many critics emphasize the importance of writing for oneself. There exists an opinion that writing the self minimizes the possibilities of distortion of experiences and realities. It is often argued that writings on behalf of the 'other' might result in lack of specificities and essence of 'the other' and therefore may fall short of a true and complete portrayal of 'the other.' As

Spanakos (1998) observes "The colonized is further dehumanized by the national bourgeois who adopt the colonizer's world as their own and look upon their fellow colonized with disgust, anger, and pity, through a very profound internalization of the prejudices of the colonizer" (p. 149).

The *indigenista* tradition is one such tradition of writing on 'the other' that authors practiced in order to portray the plight of the indigenous communities of Latin America in a postcolonial set up. The novels inspired in this tradition or the *indigenista* novels attempted to uncover the miseries of indigenous populations of postcolonial Latin America.

The pros and cons of *indigenista* writing have been exhaustively discussed. Arguments in favor and against have been made. The principle argument posed against

the genre was its intrinsic inefficacy to address the perspective of the indigenous communities. Mariátegui opined that the real *indigenista* work could only spring up from the pen of the indigenous writers. He stressed that the *indigenista* tradition was essentially a work of the mestizo class. Other critics raised similar criticisms. Ana Peluffo (n.d.) highlights the opinion of Antonio Conejo Polar who considers *indigenista* writings as “un acto de traducción de un universo cultural a otro, que aunque busca legitimarse recurriendo a una perspectiva interna (de testigo vivencial), se efectúa desde una óptica inevitablemente exterior y ajena al universo quechua y andino.”

The issue of representation emphasized aneed for opinion from the inside (that it was not possible for the sympathizers from outside to understand the depth of the Indian problem and completely express its nature and complexity). These writings were relegated to a secondary status by many critiques, as they allegedly failed to portray the indigenous cosmovision. *Indigenista* literature was considered a sort of nationalistic humanistic project indifferent toward the indigenous cosmovision.

Many also emphasized the lack of decolonial indigenous mode of self-writing. It can be argued that the criticism of the post-colonial social structure was although anti-Eurocentric but still Eurocentric in its modalities and expressions that made the indigenous voice even more wanting. It was claimed that a bourgeois voice unaware of the inner voice of the *Indios* was trying to speak for them.

Colonialism systematically downplayed the indigenous cultural universe. Under colonialism, the autochthonous universe remained not only undervalued but also a site of Eurocentric theological and scientific criticism. Colonial institutions manipulated the cultural universe of indigenous communities to device wicked ways to subjugate indigenous societies.

Christianized racist criticism of indigenous communities that began way back in 1492 has transformed and evolved in the postcolonial society, manifesting itself in much subtler ways. It is a tendency to project the indigenous cultural universe as an impediment not only in the path of nation-building but also in the evolution of indigenous societies. It, therefore, only seems right that a work like *Huasipungo* is criticized for its total ignorance towards the cultural universe of the *Indios*.

Rocío Durán Barba (2008) echoes the same

concern that critics like Mariátegui expressed “... personalmente pienso que solo los indígenas son capaces de ahondar en la sicología indígena” (p.39).

Unlike some of the *indigenista* authors like Arugedas and Asturias who tried to dwell in the world of the indigenous community, Icaza kept his focus on the socio-political and economic aspects that contributed to the plight of the *Indios*. Icaza remained unimpressed by the wide readership that *Huasipungo* had garnered. For him, *Huasipungo* was a political project. He wished that the people would get inspired by the tail of *Huasipungo* and would fight for their right, a wish that he shared with Rocío Durán Barba (2008) in an interview. The indigenous cultural universe was never a part of Icaza’s plan in the writing of *Huasipungo*.

... Yo siempre he contestado que no estaba contento con el éxito material que he obtenido con aquel libro, a pesar de las múltiples ediciones que se han hecho del mismo. Y no estaba satisfecho porque en realidad no había cumplido la profunda esperanza que yo mantenía con aquel trabajo, es decir mover la conciencia de la gente de mi pueblo para pronta resolución del problema despertar a la vez la rebeldía de las masa campesinas en beneficio de su liberación (p. 66-63).

Undoubtedly, the novel fails poorly in its portrayal of the indigenous cultural universe. The *Indio* is incorporated in the work without the ethnic components specific to him. The absence of the Indian world is, indeed, a kind of exclusion.

However, how did it happen that *Huasipungo* became a work which gained readers’ attention across the world? If the work lacked indigenous world-view, why would it attract readers who would read an *indigenista* novel for the sake of knowing the *Indio*?

This article holds that one of the reasons why *Huasipungo* was received warmly in the literary circle worldwide was its urgent appeal for addressing the issues of indigenous people. The plight of the *Indios* of *Huasipungo* could easily be related to the rest of the indigenous population across Latin America. Besides, in many ways, their miseries could be identified with other marginalized and oppressed communities across the globe. Moreover, the criticism of agencies of oppression in the novel was precise and straightforward.

A bourgeois concern alone was not sufficient to address the Indian problem. Far away from the elitist take on the Indian problem, Icaza suggested through his

writings that the Indian problem was not a complex and subjective one but rather a problem created by an inhuman tradition blindly practiced by a dishonest, callous and ignorant section of the privileged society. The elites' attitude towards the *Indios* in *Huasipungo* indicates a total disregard for universal moral values. It is this disregard for the universal moral values expressed by the characters like Don Alfonso, Policarpio, Tuerto Rodriguez, and the Cura that immediately catches the reader's attention. The reader almost effortlessly recognizes that the *Indios* are being wronged. In the section hereafter, we will inquire into the idea of universal moral values and will examine the novel to understand Icaza's plan to take on the oppressors through a series of events that exposes how they overlook the values which are common to every society.

### **The idea of universal moral values:**

The idea of universal moral values dates back to the beginning of human civilization. However, the concept of universal moral values cannot be proved conclusively. The anti-universalist position warns about the possibility of generalizing the dominant values as universal values. Existential philosophers have argued for the relativity of values and considered them subjective. As Kinnier, Kernes, and Dautheribes (2000) summarize, "the main argument against universalism is that no individual or group of individuals is qualified for promulgating what is good or correct for all people."

For Guba and Lincoln, "human ideals of objectivity and universalism are fantasies" (in Kinnier, Kernes and Dautheribes, 2000, p.6).

However, Kidder warns us against rejecting shared values just due to some exceptions wherein morals are relative and subjective.

Getting deeper into the debate of Relativist versus Universalist Clarke (1968) titles his article with a question on the very existence of universal values. He asks, "Are there universal values?"

As per Clarke (1968), there is no specific way to establish that the relativist approach is superior to the Universalist one or vice-versa. He observes, "One thing is clear, however; the piling up of ethnographic data showing wide diversities of moral beliefs and practices is not sufficient in itself to demonstrate the conclusion that there can be no values beyond those of particular human groups. The fact of disagreement does not prove the impossibility thereof; and neither, of course, does the

fact of agreement canonise as true the true belief agreed upon" (p. 39-40).

It can be extrapolated from the above arguments and counter-arguments adduced by critics that it is presently impossible to reject either of the two approaches entirely. However, this study takes the position that the universality of moral values may not be complete, but at various levels, humanity across the world share common values regardless of the diversity of culture. As Bell observes, "we are left with no way to condemn cannibalism physical torture, mutilation, wife-beating, child abuse, slavery, murder, or genocide if they are part of the habitual practice and cultural traditions of a group" (p. 18).

It is based on this idea of shared common standards of morals across cultures; we intend to analyse *Huasipungo*, a work which has been widely criticized for ignoring the specific aspects of the indigenous cultural universe.

### **The idea of basic human values in *Huasipungo*:**

*Huasipungo* appeared at a time when across the continent there existed a common wish for a stable nation-state. The Indian problem was a significant challenge in the path of nation-building. Social realist authors and thinkers set out to criticize the hegemonic structure, which sustained the oppressive system that kept the Indians backward.

The backwardness of the Indians was ascribed to the social and economic factors and an unhealthy power structure. Unlike earlier views that attributed the inferiority of the Indians to their race, these authors claimed that the inherent problem lied in the relation of production. For example, Mariátegui asserted the problem of unequal distribution of land. These writers and authors expressed the urgent need to address the Indian problem for the progress of the nation.

*Huasipungo* stands out for the simplicity with which it portrays the Indian problem. It does not set out to offer a critical analysis of the Indian problem, nor does it intend to see the problem in a philosophical light; it merely exposes the oppressors' despicable conduct towards the Indians which causes the Indian crisis. It depicts how the universal moral values are held in total disregard by the elites who consider the *Indios* practically nothing more than a tool for their comfort and progress.

The colonizer is not much concerned about the socio-cultural issues which predominated in the mind of the

first settlers. The colonizer in *Huasipungo* is of a more advanced type. The business of knowing the other (the *Indio*) is over. The other has been thoroughly known and understood. From a postcolonial perspective, the colonizers in the novel are the local capitalists (the *Blanco* and the *Mestizos*) and the people who support them. In Icaza's plans to relate the plight of the natives, as accurately and vividly as possible, it is relevant to show an interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. It can be understood by the instances provided in the novel that the primary focus every time is to portray the exploitation of the Indians whenever there is any interaction. It is a deliberate attempt by the author to place the colonizer and the colonized in transactional situations. The novel highlights the abuse of the indigenous people who from their tribal status have been coerced into a class-based social structure. The mode of interaction has changed in this later phase. The native's socioeconomic system is more and more dependent, unlike the initial period when they at least had access to the basic means of survival. The native is not only strangulated economically but also psychologically. Absolute power is vested in the elites (creoles and mestizos) who make and break law according to their convenience. This absolute monopoly of the creoles is vital for Icaza's scheme. From the scarce and sporadic *Indio* voices in the work, it is apparent that the Indians go through such extreme oppression that they are even unable to have a logical conversation among themselves as a community. A conversation between the Indians which could throw some light on their state of mind is absent. The oppressors act without scruple. These oppressors are a vile, immoral, and selfish lot who do not even follow the most basic moral tenets of human society.

### **Family:**

Every culture in the world endorses the idea of family. Family is the most important social unit in the majority of cultures across the world. In *Huasipungo*, Don Alfonso Pereira's family is the one we get to know closely. Don Alfonso is a concerned family man. He wants everything right for his family. He always ensures that the members of his family are safe and happy. He is concerned about the honour of his family. The first few lines of the novel confirm that Don Alonso takes family seriously. The pregnancy of his unmarried daughter irritates him highly. He is looking for a way out of this crisis. We find out later that he cleverly resolves the crisis

and manages to keep the honour of his family intact. Don Alonso is an ideal man, as a father and as a husband. However, to keep his family safe and sound, Don Alonso is shown capable of hurting anyone. For Don Alonso, only his family matters. Even for a little comfort, he is willing to put the *Indios* in great trouble. In one instance, it is seen that the Pereira family ride on the shoulders of the *Indios*, as they do not wish to dirty their feet in the mud. “! Carajo! !Indio pendejo! Grito desesperado el amo ajustando las rodillas y cogiéndose de la caballero cerdosa del hombre con habilidad de jinete que se aferra al potro” (p. 14). They hire a breastfeeder for Doña Lolita's baby as Doña Lolita is still considered a young girl. They do not want to put her through the pains of motherhood, nor do they want the secret of Doña Lolita to come out.

The very rebellion that takes place at the end of the novel is not an individual rebellion declared for the safeguard of instant personal interest. It is a collective rebellion, a last resort to save their culture, tradition, and family. The Creole and mestizo characters of the novel hold the indigenous culture and tradition in utter disregard. The *Indios* are not treated by them as creatures having family. We note that in the search for an ideal breastfeeder for Doña Lolita, no concern is shown for the real child of the breastfeeder. The child of the breastfeeder dies due to his being distanced from the mother. He succumbs to hunger. Upon the death of her child, she flees from the comfort of Don Alonso's house where she is better fed than the rest of the women of her community. Her decision to flee after her son's death confirms the universal human attribute of placing the family first. She could have been expedient to consider her son's death as an accident or a misfortune, but her motherhood gets the better of her. She flees in remorse. Like any mother, regardless of race and community, she feels the weight of her son's unfortunate end heavy on her heart.

The sexual abuse of indigenous women is another case in point. In the work, Cunshi is abused by Don Alonso. The whole scene of her abuse portrays the callousness of the aggressor and the commonness of the incidences of such nature. He goes about his daily business after sexually assaulting her, free, fearless and unaccountable, “india bruta, muévete. No le hacen gozar a uno, se quedan como vacas muertas, está visto. Es una raza inferior”(p.38).

Cunshi silently suffers the abuse because she does not want to deprive her family of the *Huasipungo*. She

knows that any resistance will deprive her family of the possession of her *Huasipungo* and render her family homeless.

“¿gritar para qué? ¿Para qué le quiten el huasipungo? Para comprueben las patronas su carsishineria? ¿Para qué? No era mejor quedarse en silencio, no sentir nada, nada, frenar la amargura que se le hinchaba en el pecho y las lágrimas que se la escurrían por la nariz”(p.38).

The importance of family (among the Indians) is also highlighted in the instance of Cunshi's death when heartbroken of Andrés cries in despair for her.

He tries in vain to establish a dialogue with her:

“Ay Cunshi, sha... ¿Quién ha di cuidar pes puerquitos? ... ¿Quién ha di simbrar pes in huasipungo?... ¿Quién ha di cuidar pes guagua? ...”(p. 99-100)

Andrés would feel her absence in every little thing in life. He, in vain, tries to resuscitate his dead wife by trying to establish a dialogue with her. He cannot imagine a life without Cunshi around him.

We note that contrary to the perception of the oppressors, the *Indios* do possess emotions of love and attachment. They too feel affection and pain. In the very mourning of Andrés, we find a strong sense of personal and emotional loss. Any sane human being would find this total disregard for family values deplorable and provocative.

Similarly, the Cura shamelessly negotiates the price of Cunshi's grave, showing total disregard for the feelings of a person who has lost a family member.

We see that throughout the novel, the oppressors hold no respect for the family values of the *Indios*. They consider them nothing more than objects they use to get their things done. These powerful instances are capable of provoking outrage in the reader from any cultural background. The reader is bound to feel pity for the *Indios*. It is paradoxically remarkable that the oppressors are not true to even those values they claim to uphold. In the absence of Don Alfonso's wife and daughter, Don Alfonso abuses Juana. Moreover, the Cura, who is supposed to be closer to God than any other man in the village, joins him in abusing Juana. It is evident that they are vile opportunists who do not regard the values of their own religion, culture and family.

### **Self - Respect:**

The colonizer in *Huasipungo* is authoritative to the extreme. There is no space for negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized. A considerable fragment of

the work is exhausted portraying the life of the family which is exclusively sustained by the unrewarding labor of the *Indios*. Such an instance of extreme indifference of the family to the situation of the *Indios* not only depicts the submissive and defeated psychology of the *Indios* also the emotional numbness of the colonizers. It is later made apparent that the animals are treated better. While the bull is formally cremated, a patch of land for the grave of Andrés's wife is denied. They are not allowed to eat even a dead animal. The *Indios* are sold like cattle, and their prices are lower than that of cattle.

The colonized is utterly submissive and unthinkably stoic. The colonizer, regardless of his thorough hatred, does not hesitate to use them for their benefit. A generally deplored Indian, who holds an image inferior to that of an animal, is invited to feed Doña Lolita's baby. It is not the ambivalence that leads them to take such steps but a distorted sense of superiority which gives them the psychological impulse to act insensitively without scruple. Under the rule of the *gamonales*, the Indians have developed a strong sense of self-hood. In the absence of the social organization which can regulate the day to day life of the natives, the natives are left to fend for themselves all alone, as individuals. This lack of organizational structure turns the natives more and more self-concerned and self-involved to the point where they become selfish, both materially and existentially. The defeat is evident in the psyche of the *Indios*. When Polycarpio goes out to look for a breastfeeder for Dona Lolita's illegitimate son, a kind of competition begins amongst the Indian women. On the one hand, this event points towards a lack of social organization among the Indians to pose a determined collective resistance, on the other hand, it also shows the compulsion of the colonizers to adjust their tenets and values. They cannot continue with the essentialist values they so much cherish.

Andrés bears the oppression of the colonizers with his silence. Unlike others from his community, he is defiant and acts as if he were the master of his own life “Va para dos años que, desobedeciendo al mayordomo y al cura que le querían casar con una longa de Filocorrales...” (p.18). The death of the critical figures by his hand signals the extreme sense of alterity in which Andrés not only finally recognizes his ‘other’ but also stands against him, “Seis cadáveres, entre los que se contaban el de Jacinto y el de Tuerto Rodríguez, se quedaron tendidos en el chaquiñán” (p.119) . Andrés is the only indigenous character in the novel who strives to

conduct himself with a certain degree of confidence. Andrés's self-respect is not the inflated ego seen in the oppressors like Don Alonso, the Cura, and Tuerto Rodríguez; it is something he has inherited from his Indian ancestors of precolonial America who roamed free and conducted themselves according to their own set of indigenous laws. The *Indios* have forgotten who they are. Under constant suppression, they have stopped believing in their own values and are acting against their own nature. The daily verbal, physical, and mental abuse that the *Indios* silently endure can be imputed to their low self-respect. The indigenous self-respect is constantly trampled beneath a deplorably high ego of the colonizers. Self-respect is crucial for lasting happiness. Icaza's *Indios* must regain their self-respect. It is what the *Indios* need to awaken the possibility of freeing themselves from oppression. In the end, the Indians finally regain their self-respect. They honour the fact they are indigenous, an identity worth dying for.

The *Indios* are pushed to the breaking point when they are asked to vacate their Huasipungo. Now the *Indios* want justice for themselves; and they know they must unite and fight for it.

### **Religion:**

The creation of new rules, customs, and beliefs in a postcolonial space create a sense of confusion as well as admiration among both the colonized and the colonizer. In the novel, though, the colonizer shows no attraction to native belief, the Indians are forcefully made to follow the customs and beliefs of the colonizers. As a defeated group looking to reinvigorate their faith, they incorporate Christianity into their native belief system and accept the priest as their guiding light. The Indians adhere to the Christian rules and regulations but see them oppressive. However, they fear the words of the Cura and recognize the power of the religion they find challenging to follow.

The Cura ruthlessly fixes the price of Cunshi's grave; "No se puede. Eso es una estupidez, mezclar las burdas transacciones terrestres con una cosa celestial. ¡Dios mío, qué es lo que oigo!" (p.104).

The connivance of the church in the oppression of the *Indios* is shameful for many Christians.

As Gonzales Poyatos expresses his pain as a Christian:

"Ni que decir tiene que tanto la lectura de *Huasipungo* como la exposición de todo lo que en él se dice acerca del cristianismo, me duele y me duele

profundamente y esto porque me siento heredero de esos que con muchos sacrificios predicaron la fe y porque creo que nadie que mire la situación del indio en el Ecuador puede dejar de sufrir" (in Duran Barba, 2008, p. 87).

In *Huasipungo*, several agencies collaborate to oppress the Indians. They use cruel tricks to misuse the Indians for their welfare. Even the *Cura*, who is supposed to play the role of a defender, connives with the oppressor. He not only connives with them but also becomes one of them. He actively takes part in the oppression and manipulation of the *Indios*. He scares the *Indios* by virtue of the power vested in him as a priest; he misguides them and, worst of all, abuses them. He does things that Christianity stands opposed to "Después del amo vino el cura, aun cuando un poco más repugnante, pero sólo hacer el amor con mimos de chiquillo mamón... Cuando la Juana probó a levantarse, disimuló con una sonrisa la vergüenza que le hicieron sentir los ojos del más pequeño de los hijos, que había estado espectando la escena desde un rincón de la cocina" (p.45).

Moral values are mostly founded in religion. Religious institutions often work to ensure the smooth practice of morals and values in society. It is through religion; values are upheld during times of crisis.

The connivance of the priest, the representative of the church, therefore, with the oppressors is the most immoral of all, given that the church is supposed to protect the very people whom it abuses in collusion with the *gamonales*.

### **Human dignity:**

The creoles society relies exclusively on the manual labor of the *Indios* to run its life. Nevertheless, it does not see the services rendered by the *Indios* from a transactional perspective. They act in a way as if it were a divine right to treat the *Indios* as they wished. The interaction between the natives and the creole is a conscious exchange. There is a particular predefined set of rules and behaviors that govern the relationship between the colonizers and the natives. This well-defined social structure indicates a post resistant society which came into being after the initial conflict which characterized the first interaction. The colonization is complete in all respects: economic, social, and cultural. All conscious elements which once formed a tool of discrimination have now been so naturalized that almost unconscious and effortless discrimination prevails against the native.

It is this sense of racial superiority which helps them distinguish themselves from the native who exists with them. Such aversion and disgust prevail that anything Indian is considered defiled and unwelcomed. Indian is an agent of discomfort and irritation. There is a clear sense of deliberate disassociation from the natives to preserve the purity of the race and class. However, we see this disgust towards the native is not absolute; adjustments are made according to circumstances. The native is entirely missing in Don's personal life. Though a completely egalitarian society is impossible, all cultures across the world advocate equality. The dehumanizing alienation of the *Indios* is of the meanest kind. Every society in this world cherishes the ideals of mutual respect and human dignity. Icaza's establishes that the oppressors do not recognize the shared principles of humanity in order to manage socio-cultural and racial differences.

#### **Sense of belonging:**

The need for a sense of belonging is found in all cultures across the world. It is a human need. In *Huasipungo*, the parcel of land on which the Indian community dwells is not a patch of land but their home. They have been reduced to a congested and unhealthy lifestyle. However, these poverty-stricken people are as attached to their huts as the rich to their palace. The comfort the huts of *Huasipungo* offer is nothing in comparison to their grandeur of past when they owned the land and forest and everything around them. Even in this reduced circumstances, the sense of belonging is alive. The Indians consider the *Huasipungo* their home and the idea of leaving the land they dwell is unacceptable to them. The attempt to dislodge them from their *Huasipungo* is an example of indifference to universal moral values. It is in this denial Icaza implicitly justifies the move of the Indian, anyone or any group in the place of the Indian would do the same. They strongly associate themselves with the little patch of land on which they live. Like any other society in the world, they too need a place they can call home.

It is only when the oppression reaches the extreme, (the *Indios* are asked to vacate their *Huasipungo*) they finally regain the sense of community and brotherhood. They know that they were treated as a group; they are being asked to leave without exception. It is when they realize that they all belong to one single unit and thus rise together to face the enemy.

Among the oppressors, we see a distorted sense of

belonging. They assert their sense of belonging by creating a binary of *Indios* and *Us*. The only way they can connect is by excluding the *Indio*, by treating the *Indio* as their 'other'. In the oppressors' space, there is no place for the *Indio*. A sense of belonging is important for survival. It is a basic need. However, we note that Don Alonso and his associates are not only together to experience the comfort that a group offers, but they are united because they want to exploit the *Indios*. Thus, we see that their very union is immoral.

#### **Conclusion:**

In *Huasipungo*, the main focus is to underscore the mindless discrimination practiced by the elites against the indigenous population. A major part of the novel is dedicated to exposing the socioeconomic oppression and psychosocial suppression of the indigenous community. Reading the work from the perspective of universal moral values makes it an eye-catching account for the readers from societies across the globe. In the novel, we come across a form of discrimination which is indirect and systematic. The Indians, by law, are as much the citizens of postcolonial Ecuador as the elites. However, the law only seems to be neutral on paper. In the name of providing employment, the Indian labour is misused. They are made to overwork with little or no wage. They work in deplorable conditions. In the guise of progress, the indigenous population is made to work for the profit of the elites. It is not only their work which is abused; their 'body' is abused as well. Exhausted labourers are offered alcohol; women are sexually abused. They cannot even look for solace in the religion they have been forced to follow. In short, Icaza not only exposes the profit-minded elites of his country but also portrays a clear picture of the *Indio* who receives a treatment that cannot be justified by the morals and values of any society across the world. In his portrayal of the discriminatory practices against the natives, he justifies rebellion as the need of the hour, not for settling scores but for justice, dignity, and happiness, which every society wishes for itself. The work highlights the violation of universal moral values by the dominant class and also asserts the existence of the *Indios* as human beings, a simple rational reality that has been denied to the native Indians. The wide success of the novel and inspiration that it provided is a proof that even in distinctive cultures one is sure to find common moral values. Those human values that we all hold in regard and follow. The villains in *Huasipungo* are villains

because they lack those values that are shared among almost all cultures across the world. A reader from any culture can easily and instantly recognize these villains and deplore them for their conduct. As for the argument of the non-existent cultural universe of the Indios, Icaza only does the world a favour by not touching the theme on which he does not have expertise. It is not an indigenous voice that demands from Icaza the indigenous cultural universe. If the *Indios* were left to practice their culture in the first place, there would be no need to examine or understand his cultural universe. The demand for the indigenous cultural universe come from the quarters responsible for the destruction of the indigenous culture. As DuránBarba (2008) accentuates the contribution of the indigenista authors, "...fueron escritores que consagraron a describir una situación, a promover la denuncia de los horrores del sometimiento de una raza. Les queda el mérito de haber lanzado la protesta, de haberla universalizado" (p.38).

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