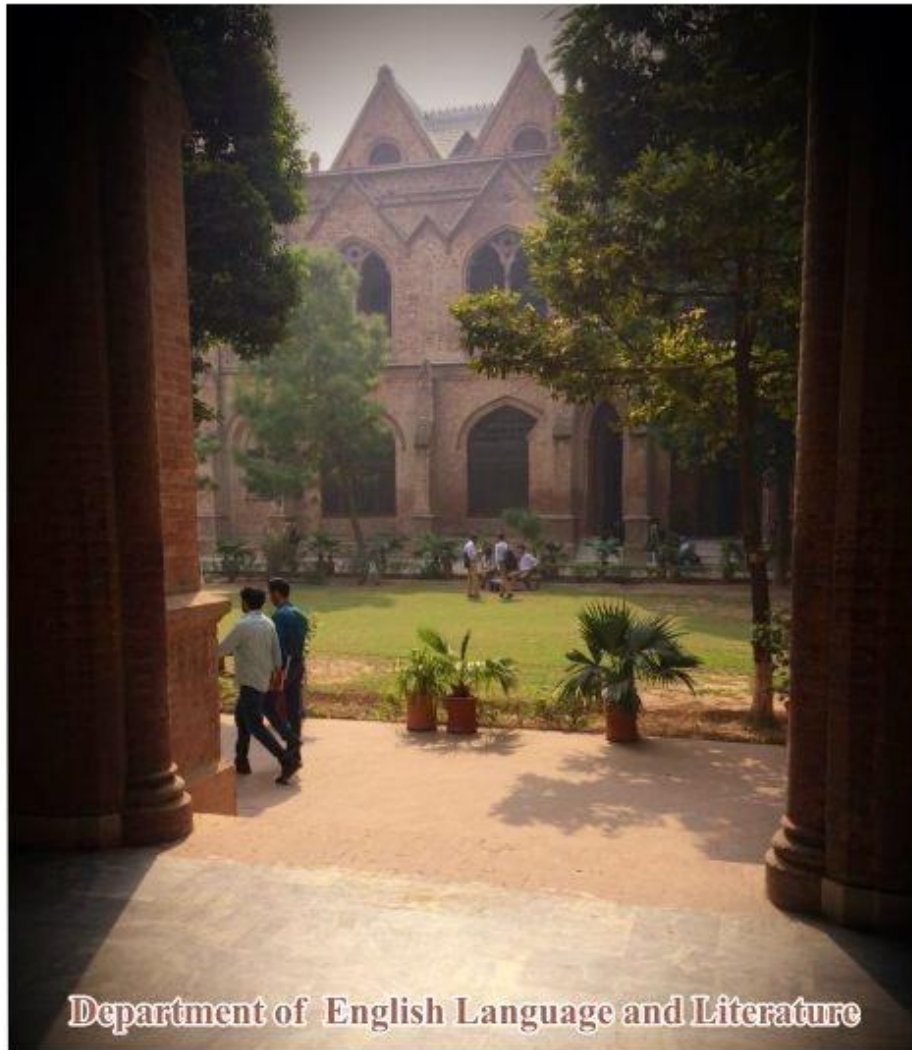


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This issue of *Explorations* is dedicated to the fond memory of

Professor Dr. A. H. Khayal

(1927-2015)

(Teacher, Scholar, Mentor)

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Editorial

Writing almost over a century apart and separated by vast physical distances, two luminaries of English and Urdu literature, Mathew Arnold and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, both emphasised the importance of punctilious self-reckoning on the part of writers and critics alike. In his essay titled “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864), Mathew Arnold, contrary to the opinion of the wider European literary establishment of the time, reiterated the primacy of the critical enterprise over the creative one. In fact, Arnold did not eschew the creative from the critical, but was of the opinion that critical output was one of the many ways of exercising “free creative activity”. He held the view that critics and philosophers were responsible for generating the “atmosphere” of “new ideas”, which the literary artists then made use of for the purpose of producing great works of art. According to Arnold, “for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment”. These elements according to him “are not in the control” of the “creative power”; rather “they are more within the control of the critical power” and “[i]t is the business of the critical power.... in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.” In this way, wrote Arnold,

[the] critical power tends, at last, to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself. It tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature.

As regards the important business of punctilious self-reckoning on the part of the critic, Arnold insisted that “a critic may with advantage seize an occasion for trying his own conscience, and for asking himself of what real service at any given moment the practice of criticism either is or may be made to his own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others”.

In his essay “Writers, Where Do You Stand?” published sometime around the late twentieth century, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, dwelling on matters of a similar nature as Arnold, emphasised the overriding significance of the creative literary endeavour and the role of the writer in society. According to Faiz, a writer “is committed to his country and his people. As a guide, philosopher and friend, he must lead them out of the darkness of ignorance, superstition and unreasoned prejudices into the light of knowledge and reason, out of the labyrinth of tyranny into the ways of freedom...” (204). While ascribing the important task of steering the nation in the right direction to the writers, Faiz also emphasised the need for them to be introspective and self-critical and ask themselves if they were writing socially relevant literature or if the bulk of what they were producing was in fact “intellectually superficial, ideologically confused, emotionally insincere, inhibited by fear and corrupted by greed” (203).

In view of Pakistani English Literature’s recent rise to prominence, as witnessed in the average Pakistani student’s growing interest in the subject, one finds oneself mildly tempted to steer the course of this discussion in the direction of this body of writing, and consider for a moment the job of a writer and a literary critic in the context of Pakistan, especially when it comes to the standards of literary excellence that critics and writers ought to apply to themselves in their capacity as members of the literary fraternity.

The introduction of courses on Pakistani writing in English in Pakistani universities is a recent phenomenon. In fact, the institutionalisation of the subject took place only ten to fifteen

years ago, an indication of the fact that it had finally acquired legitimacy as a fit enough subject of academic enquiry. Today, we find more and more students gravitating towards the subject as is evident from the increasing number of research proposals based on topics related to this field of literature. In fact, as Claire Chambers rightly pointed out in 2011 (and the statement is as true today as it was then) that “Pakistani writers, most of them living or educated in the West, currently feature prominently in the international literary scene as award winners or nominees, best-selling authors, festival speakers and, increasingly, topics for research students and critics” (122-123). In spite of the fact that students react to this brand of writing with more criticism than acceptance, their sheer enthusiasm for the subject is infectious; in fact, their strongly voiced criticism betrays a sense of ownership that one cannot deny or refute. This criticism is commonly directed against the “inflexibly aristocratic” (Dasgupta) nature of this body of writing, such as the world portrayed in the early works of Kamila Shamsie, among others; a privileged world, full of extremely mobile, English speaking people who move at will to foreign lands for higher education. Pakistani students feel confident talking about and critiquing this body of writing, pointing out its flaws and drawbacks in an impassioned and emotionally charged manner because of its Pakistani setting. In fact, more often than not, these students claim to know the ‘real’ Pakistan better than the writers themselves, most of whom, according to them, do not know or have access to what it means to be authentically *Pakistani* because of their diasporic status. However, like most Pakistanis, these students also expect these writers to use their global appeal to good effect and portray Pakistan in a positive light.

In fact, this brand of writing is routinely and invariably saddled with the very important business of the representation of an *authentic* Pakistani identity on the part of the homebred Pakistani audiences. Managing to acquire a sense of this all-encompassing, stable and immutably

authentic identity is a matter of contentious enquiry in Pakistan, and one that has often been compared by authors such as Kamila Shamsie and others to the task of resolving a “jigsaw puzzle” (27). This is largely due to Pakistan’s socio-cultural, religious and ethno-linguistic diversity as a nation. Given this fluid and mobile identity, it is important to ask if it is ever going to be possible or if it is even desirable to imagine encapsulating and seeing the object (in this case “Pakistani identity”) via the medium of Pakistani writing in English, “as in itself it really is”, in the Arnoldian sense. Moreover, we must also ask ourselves if it is ever realistically possible for writers from any part of the world, least of all Pakistan, to adequately meet the needs and demands of their home audiences, given the sheer complexity and range of human experience. Seen this way, the very question of an authentic identity and its undeniably trustworthy and factual representation in literature becomes null and void. It becomes important instead to reconcile oneself to the notion, as Virginia Woolf famously wrote in her essay ‘Modern Fiction’, that, “Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile” (159). After all, as she rightly pointed out, “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged” (160). At the same time, she also informed writers that it was their ‘task to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit’ called life, no matter how ‘disconnected and incoherent’ with the ‘utmost sincerity’ (161).

In other words, the awareness of the fleeting, ever-changing and elusive nature of life, as suggested by Woolf, is not meant to deter writers from writing sincerely and truthfully about it, nor is it meant to prevent critics from pursuing the work of literary critical judgement conscientiously, as Arnold wrote. However, in the context of Pakistani writing in English, it is important, says Rafia Zakaria, to understand that “[the] Pakistani novel occupies a space of contestation and confusion in Pakistan”, with readers demanding an idealized portrayal of Pakistan that does not exist in reality. Zakaria advises local readers to reassess their expectations of

Pakistani writers by addressing “their own confusions and the unfulfilled distance between what Pakistan is and what they wish it to be”. Ali Faateh Khawaja on the other hand, serves us another equally important and timely reminder when he writes that, “Perhaps it is natural in a country that was not so long ago dubbed “the most dangerous nation in the world” for its citizens to be anxious, protective of its image abroad”. The task of rectifying this image however, as pointed out earlier, is more often than not ascribed to Pakistani writing in English.

The positions taken up by Zakaria and Khawaja are equally valid and reveal how strongly readers feel about this body of writing and the kind of hopes and aspirations they associate with it. And this then means that reservoirs of potential research on these topics never dry up. The current issue is also a case in point. Out of the four research articles included in this issue, two deal directly with Pakistani Anglophone fiction, while one deals with English fiction from Bangladesh. Another article focuses on water’s usefulness to writers of literary fiction as a natural and cultural resource. In their article, “Tracing the Trajectories of Love and Loss: A Comparative Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* and Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi*”, Fariha Chaudhary and Sarwat Awan analyze the complex nuances of love and loss as rooted in the lived experiences of the characters represented in the novels through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir’s polemical feminist text *The Second Sex* (1949). The writers arrive at the conclusion that whereas the female expression of love is either silenced or severely condemned in the sub-continent, the male avowal of love, is more often than not, glorified and celebrated. Sumera Khalil’s article “Bringing Home Abjection: Honour, Female Body and Religion in Qaisra Shahraz’s *The Holy Woman*” focuses on the performance and meaning of certain traditional rituals prevalent in Pakistan. She analyses Shahraz’s novel in the light of Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection in her work *Powers of Horror* (1980). Instead of focusing on the transgressive potentiality of the abject, the writer relies on a

consideration of the consequences of “being abject”. Habiba Ikram’s article titled “Remapping Bangladesh: A Palimpsestic Approach to Tehmima Anam’s Bengal Trilogy”, delineates the key features of the palimpsestic approach in Anam’s novels about Bangladesh’s history and the hidden facets of the country’s multi-layered past. In his article titled “Canada’s Contaminated Water: Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* as an Environmental Dystopian Novel”, Muhammad Ali focuses on the author’s representation of water in the novel and its use as a source of aesthetic mediation.

In the forthcoming issues, we will be publishing articles pertaining to English and American Literature, as well as Literatures of the world in English, including of course Pakistan, in order to gain an insight into what comprises and constitutes the Pakistani experience of reading these variegated forms of writing from many different parts of the world. As we move forward with the work of printing the 2017 issue of *Explorations*, we pledge to uphold high standards of academic, critical and literary enquiry so that we can successfully achieve our aim of providing a thriving and inclusive space for writers and critics alike. We want to do so for the purpose of engendering an “atmosphere”, as Arnold says, of dynamic, creative and critical enquiry. With this aim in view, this platform will continue to publish creative and critical deliberations of students, early career researchers, and seasoned academics alike for the benefit of readers, both inside and outside the academia. We hope thereby, to contribute to the process of a healthy reinterpretation of our own intellectual outlook as Pakistanis and global citizens.

Saira Fatima Dogar

Editor

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Tracing the Trajectories of Love and Loss: A Comparative Analysis of Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* and Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*

Dr. Fariha Chaudhary¹

Dr. Sarwat Awan²

Abstract

Focusing on the life trajectories of the various characters such as, Ayah, Ice Candy Man and Lenny, from Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988), and Asghar, Bilqeece and Zohra, from Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), this paper traces the complex nuances of love and loss as rooted in the lived experiences of these characters. Various theoretical strands from cultural and feminist perspectives, such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), are used to contextualize and develop the concept of love in relation to women within patriarchal societies. This paper demonstrates that love and the feelings of loss are inextricably connected and deeply influence the lives of various male and female characters. However, the male perspective on love and romance is eulogized, thereby rendering the romantic expressions as a male prerogative, whereas female expressions of love and romance are either absent or silenced. It also highlights that love and romance prefigure as a fantasy and illusion, and women within patriarchal societies project their desires onto a heroic male figure in pursuit of a happy-ever-after ending. However, this illusion of love breaks, resulting in loss and grief. Consequently, love and romance appear as ploys to strengthen and perpetuate patriarchal control over women.

Keywords: love and romance, loss, suffering, Pakistani Literature, patriarchy and women

Introduction

Pakistani Anglophone fiction has become a rich canvas, offering room for exploration of many diverse themes such as exile, journey, and diaspora as well as post-colonial and postmodern trends. Claire Chambers uses a comparative approach, placing the Pakistani Anglophone writers alongside the Muslim writers belonging to other countries such as, Khalid Hosseini, Leila Aboulela and Abdulrazak Gurnah thereby, providing a deeper understanding and a broader situation of the position of Pakistani Anglophone writers. By doing so, she urges for the acknowledgment of the

¹ Main and Corresponding author

² Co-author

complex and heterogeneous nature of the writings produced by these writers as opposed to the commonly assumed notions of ‘Muslim writers as a monolithic group’ (Chambers 123). She highlights the significant contribution of both male and female writers in exploring issues such as Islamophobia, diasporic influences on identity as well as cultural and gender interplay. In addition to this, gender and female oppression has been a major area of research interest. Similarly, concepts of love, romance, friendship, and marriage have been keenly addressed in the contemporary Pakistani Anglophone literature. This article focuses on the life trajectories of the various characters such as, Ayah, Ice Candy Man and Lenny, from Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* (1988), and Asghar, Bilqeece and Zohra from Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) in order to trace the complex nuances of love and loss as rooted in the lived experiences of these characters.

Twilight in Delhi (1940) and *Ice Candy Man* (1988), the novels chosen for this research, are both set in the Indian patriarchal society. Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* majorly focuses on the Muslims of Delhi and *Ice Candy Man* deals with the multicultural society of pre-partition Lahore which later became part of Pakistan. The underlying similarity that makes both of these novels suitable for this study is the patriarchal nature of the society where women are oppressed in both subtle and obvious ways, especially in the name of love. In addition to this, both novels can be considered as romance narratives, as Asghar and Ice Candy Man, the male protagonists from both novels, come across as tragic romantic heroes, constantly delving, experimenting and experiencing love and romance at the backdrop of grave political and social changes. They are shown to be actively engaged in love relationships, seeking, desiring, and hankering after their beloveds. This paper is contextualized within Simone de Beauvoir’s idea of women’s social position within the Indian patriarchal society in which women are shown to be victimized in the name of love. They fail to see love as an equally fulfilling experience as compared to men.

Theoretical Framework

Romantic Love: A Dangerous Emotion?

The unprecedented importance of romantic love in our lives can be understood from the fact that romantic love has ' "become a core feeling and life, a primary feeling of sociality" (Berlant 436). Apart from providing us a sense of worth, reason of existence, it also enables us to achieve personal satisfaction. According to Eva Illouz love has become, "an anchor for recognition, the perception and constitution of one's worth" (120). However, when examined within certain sociocultural settings of a particular society, romantic love may not seem as enlightening and enriching. In fact, as explained by Grossi and West "romantic love has been credited with the ability to erode and sometimes destroy the social structures that have traditionally determined and ordered human intimacy . . . it promotes individual autonomy and agency at the cost of disconnection from obligations deriving from family, class, religion, duty and ethnic affiliation" (2). In the context of the present research paper, romantic love has been examined within the framework of heterosexuality and South Asian patriarchal Indian/Pakistani Muslim society.

Love and romance in Pakistani Anglophone fiction is mostly explored within the framework of marriage. The romance narratives mostly centre on projecting the image of a woman settled in a heterosexual marriage, requiring a man to ensure a happy, safe and fulfilled life. This reflects, as asserted by Catherine Roach, "a rather limited, traditional and patriarchal vision of women's life possibilities" (4). Thus for women within south Asian patriarchal societies love and romance translates into different meanings for men and women. Love for women is a total devotion of body and soul, a complete merger with a superior master, the husband. Whereas, for a man, it is merely a part of his life, a temporary state, a value to his personality. Marilyn Friedman, speaking in relation to the merger experienced in romantic love, explains the emotional intertwining and

mutual dependability of the couple upon each other which may lead to a state of significantly reduced autonomy; this proves to be more detrimental for women as compared to men owing to the social context guided by norms and traditional cultural values. This argument finds support in the views of psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin who claims that the plague of male dominance continues to hunt contemporary gender relation which still insist on associating “masculinity with autonomy and the position of subject” and “femininity with dependency and the position of object” (qtd. in Friedman 128).

Love narratives basically inform and instruct about the “nature and the meaning of desire and attachment”, making this a human experience that, “manifests in a particular form ... invested with particular meanings” (Langford 2). Elaine Baruch in her book gives the following comprehensive definition of love:

Love has been variously defined as narcissism, illusion, idealization, identification, crystallization, reparation, regression, fusion, inspiration, infatuation, pathology, health, mythology, physiology, spirituality, lust, madness, sanity, wisdom, folly, altruism, selfishness, dependence, a finding of self, a losing of self, a source of freedom, a source of oppression, an escape from the world, a bulwark in the world, in the interest of the state, against the state. (Baruch 2)

The above comprehensive definition of love clearly highlights the complexity associated with this emotion as well as the psychological, emotional and mental effects of love for an individual. The life trajectories of the various characters chosen for this study aptly display this multifaceted interplay of love. Victor Karandashev in his book *Romantic Love in Cultural Contexts* explains the differences between passionate and compassionate love in the following words, “Passionate love is commonly associated with the terms ‘arousal’, ‘desire’, ‘passion’, and

‘infatuation’. Compassionate love is associated with, ‘love’, ‘affection’, ‘liking’, ‘attraction’, and ‘caring’” (6). As evident, passionate love is considered to be more basic and replete with sexual connotations whereas compassionate love refers to the spiritual devotional aspect of love. He further differentiates between the Eros and Agape types of love and associates the Eros type of love as passionate in nature, aimed towards sexual fulfillment, whereas Agape is classified as noble and devoted expression of love spiritual and divine in nature.

This division of love into ‘passionate or Eros’ and ‘compassionate or Agape’ is significant as it remains a predominant feature of the various romantic associations presented in the novels. To be more specific, male characters such as Ice Candy Man and Asghar are often shown to understand and respond to love urges from a passionate view whereas women such as Ayah, Bilqeece and Zohra remain limited to the compassionate expressions of love. However, this is not to claim that this division is fixed in terms of gender. On the contrary, quite interestingly, both Asghar and Ice Candy Man are also shown to change from passionate, demanding, dominating to compassionate, subservient and self - effacing lovers during the course of the novel. It is precisely this shift and the ease with which male figures are able to use and modify love urges for their benefits that makes love and romance a complicated and challenging situation for women within patriarchal societies, both within and outside the bond of marriage.

Furthermore, within the South Asian context, the commonly understood types of love fall in two categories of *Ishq-e-mazaji* and *Ishq-e-haqiqi*. The first kind refers to the love of a person or a human whereas the second one refers to the devotional love of a human being for his creator, Allah, the Almighty. The *Ishq-e-haqiqi* is understood to be the more pure, spiritual and devotional as compared to the other. Often the journey of love begins with the *Ishq-e-Mizaji* and leads to the *Ishq-e-haqiqi* or is supposed to lead to it, often due to the failure in the pursuit of the human

beloved. According to J. R. Haule the mystical tradition of Sufism in the Islamic school of thought is a huge influence on the notion of romantic love. He asserts, “Divine love is the depth, meaning and esoteric secret residing in profane love” (3). He further asserts that in the world of romantic literature there are only two ways of overcoming the painful distance i.e. madness or death. In his words, “Whether we speak of madness or death, the goal of love appears to be nothing less than a loss of ego . . . Madness and death both do away with the hindrances of body, social convention, consciousness, and even individuality” (9). This loss of self and the blurring of boundaries between the self and the ego is considered as a psychological dysfunction but in the Sufi tradition of Islam, this loss of the self and the negation of one’s ego is positively seen and understood through a term, “*Fana*”. It is a verb which literally means the passing away, disappearing, dissolving, vanishing or changing spiritually from one form to another.

Ice Candy Man’s desperation for Ayah reaches to a point where Ice Candy Man imagines himself to have achieved ‘fana’. His lack of concern for his physical appearance, homelessness and constant wandering after Ayah bears a startling resemblance with a *dervish* wandering in the pursuit of love. However, examined closely, this transition in love is basically another ploy used by Ice Candy Man to ensnare Ayah. He initially tries domination in order to control her, make her love him, later he shifts to submission as a manipulative strategy. His beggar like appearance is to win back Ayah by trying to show how loving he is. This shift is also displayed by Asghar in *Twilight in Delhi* whose initial submissive pining for his beloved, metamorphoses into aggressive coldness for her. This indicates how male characters often use love as a power enabling strategy in order to control, dominate and keep women in a subordinated position.

To Love or not to Love: Cultural Complexities

Love and romance are culturally diverse concepts that can be expressed and understood in multiple shades and hues. Being an emotional feeling, love, is a slippery concept that often requires an emotional depth to grasp its full meaning. The concept of love varies from culture to culture and different words are often used to express the feelings of love. Wendy Langford likewise writes about the cultural conditioning of love across societies through specific stories and narratives that inform its meaning for individuals of a certain culture. Speaking in the context of romantic love in heterosexual experiences, Gabriele Schafer similarly stresses the need to place romantic love in a particular time period and cultural context for a fairer understanding. She further claims that “the discourse of romantic love is informed by many (competing) textual and cultural sources” (189). In other words, a culturally informed discourse regarding love plays an active role in allowing individuals to make a sense of what being in love is or how they should feel in love or what being in love should feel like. Likewise, Jackson asserts:

We create for ourselves a sense of what being in love is. We do this by participating in sets of meanings constructed, interpreted, propagated and deployed throughout our culture, through learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self. We make sense of feeling and relationships in terms of love because a set of discourses around love pre-exist us as individuals and through these we have learnt what love means”. (12)

In the context of the above argument, the various characters chosen for analysis in this research display a strong tendency of relating to culturally informed pre-existing narratives to understand and respond to their love urges. For example, the young Bilqeece in *Twilight in Delhi* is instructed about the sinful nature of emotions through the culturally constructed discourse of

modesty for women. Similarly, Asghar's dismal view of love originates from the folklores of tragic romances that are an integral part of the Indian Subcontinent's history.

Patriarchy and the Dynamics of Love and Romance

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is considered as a ground breaking contribution to women's social position in patriarchal western society. Beauvoir drew theoretical inspirations from Jean Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism to explain the social existence of women in a society dominated by men. She also explored the concept of romantic love between both sexes. She highlights how a patriarchal society cultivates the feeling of inferiority and low self-worth in women from childhood who are taught to see their existence in relation to a man, the master. According to Beauvoir this cultivation of inferiority in women does not allow women to see love as an equally fulfilling experience for women in patriarchal societies.

Love and romance in traditional patriarchal societies such as Indian and Pakistani, yields interesting manifestations for men and women. It is often disputed as a liberating as well as constricting phenomenon. Philosophers and sociologists are divided on the significance and role of romantic love in empowering women in patriarchal societies due to its connection with agency and freedom. Some feminist such as Eva Illouz, Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacy assert that romantic love can be an empowering, liberating experience capable of breaking social barriers. On the other hand, feminist theorists such as Marilynne Friedman and Wendy Langford argue that love results in misery, dissatisfaction and misguided false promises that work to further oppress and bind women within patriarchal structures. Eva Illouz in her book based on the sociological inquiry of love negates the transcendental capacity of love in offering happiness or self-realization, and claims, " [love] . . . as one of cultural practices that through which women are made to accept and (love) their submission to men" (4). Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1969) also criticizes the

patriarchal nature of the western society and points out the manipulative nature of romantic love in emotionally exploiting women. In addition to this, men in male dominated societies view love as their prerogative thus demanding to be loved in response to their love and fascination for a woman. For instance, Ice candy man demands and expects Ayah to love him simply because he loves her. Here lies the danger for women like Ayah who are then sexually and physically victimized for refusing to reciprocate. Even those women who do reciprocate like Bilqeece, become domestic slaves through marriage and cease to remain the object of admiration for their husbands.

Analysis and Discussion

Romantic association, as portrayed in Pakistani English literature, is more than often taken as a precursor for prospective marriage. Owing to the traditional structure of the Indian patriarchal society, as presented in the novels, female sexuality is channelled through early marriages thus channelling love and romance through marriage. As the young narrator of *Ice Candy Man*, Lenny comments regarding Gita and her husband, who had recently moved to their locality, in the following words, “Because theirs is an arranged marriage, they are now steamily in love. Gita is always smiling-bubbling with gladness” (43). Love outside the bonds of marriage is not only socially rejected and criticized but is shown to bring disastrous consequences especially for women. This is aptly demonstrated through the life trajectory of Ayah, and Zohra, the main female protagonists of *Ice Candy Man* and *Twilight in Delhi* respectively who suffer disastrous consequences for indulging in love and romance prior to marriage. In cases where romantic relationships do not result in marriage, the consequences are far more destructive for women as compared to men. For instance, *Ice Candy Man* majorly deals with the failed love affair of Ice Candy Man, the main protagonist of the novel, and Shanta known as Ayah, a Hindu nanny, who

works for Lenny's Parsi family. Ayah is a young attractive woman who breaks the conventional position of women in a hugely patriarchal and male dominated Indian society of the pre-divided Indian subcontinent. According to Lenny, "Ayah becomes breathless laughing and almost rolls on the grass. Her sari slips off her shoulders and her admirers relish the brown gleam of her convulsed belly beneath her skimpy blouse and the firm joggle of her rotund bosom" (100).

Ayah's frank associations with varied men are a transgression of the conventional modesty and restriction associated with female sexuality and mobility in both traditional Hindu and Muslim societies. Ayah's flirtatious behaviour with her male friends works to her disadvantage as they begin to see her as a sexualized object free to access and play around with. Consequently, Ice Candy Man sees Ayah as a receiver of love, an object that can be loved but not as an active agent who can choose her romantic partner. Her initial tolerance of his meaningful advances leads her to a dead end where rejection of his marriage proposal proves to be a direct blow to his male ego. Ice Candy Man is unable to overcome rejection from Ayah and hurls himself into a love-hate relationship with her, both victimizing, and loving her at the same time. His relationship with Ayah transforms, grows and develops from fascination, admiration to lust, madness and over-possessiveness and ends with a state of frenzy and semi madness as he loses Ayah forever.

Ayah's romantic liaisons with a range of men initiate within Lenny, the young Parsi girl Ayah looks after, an understanding of love and romance between men and women. She observes the lustful and emotional desires her admirers are able to ignite in Ayah and the equally demanding and passionate longings that she in turn arises in them. Ayah's love affairs indirectly demonstrate before Lenny the complexities of love and romance and the dynamics involved in such relationships. Interestingly, like Ayah, Lenny too begins to fantasize herself being loved by a lover. Like Ayah she imagines herself the recipient of love, she wants to be admired just like Ayah.

Interestingly, her understanding of love is also channelled through marriage. She worries about getting married and is afraid that nobody would want to marry her, and therefore, love her. Her yearning for a husband is actually her desire for a lover. Lenny and Ayah, are both of different ages, yet both women display similar characteristics of passive recipients of love and experience loss, suffering and exploitation in the name of love. Just like Ayah is sexually victimized by the man she considered her companion, Lenny too faces sexual advances from her cousin, her childhood companion, who tries to fondle her body. Both women are awakened to the physical and passionate aspect of love, thereby, limiting female experience and expression of love and romance to their bodies. Ice Candy Man loves, whereas Ayah is being loved and sexually desired by a range of men including Ice Candy Man, the Gardner, the cook and Sherbet Khan. Ayah is mostly presented as a mute entity who is sought, emotionally exploited and victimized in the name of love. Interestingly, all of these women present different perspectives on love and romance within a patriarchal society. It is precisely this transformational journey of love in general and the complex nuances of love as an emotion within South Asian patriarchal society in particular that this paper aims to capture. All the female characters experience love and loss in their own ways. Their life trajectories aptly display the complex nuances of love within a multi-cultural, male dominated, politically charged dynamic environment of the Indian subcontinent. Ice Candy Man is perhaps one of the most dynamic male characters of the novel, *Ice Candy Man*. Does he really love Ayah? How does his love for Ayah change during the course of the story? Does he, being a man, see love differently from Ayah? These are some of the questions that come to mind as we see the fluctuation of emotions he displays for Ayah, his love object. Ice Candy Man's love for Ayah can be seen as a journey of evolution where his fascination with Ayah evolves through many stages from mild sexual flirtations to passionate sexual violation and at the end of the novel, he turns into a

compassionate lover who loses his sense of identity, ego, and dignity in the mad perusal of his beloved. He displays the characteristics of mania love which is defined as an emotional imbalance and uncertain behaviour. Ice Candy Man's love for Ayah is a journey of love and loss. It begins with passionate love and emerges into compassionate love. In other words, his love grows from the Eros type to the Agape. Initially Ice Candy Man sees Ayah through her sensuous body and yearns to possess her sexually. "Things love to crawl beneath Ayah's sari. Ladybirds, glow worms, Ice Candy Man's toes" (19). In another incident Masseur is shown to massage Ayah as Lenny observes: "Ayah and I are alone; they massage Ayah under her sari. Her lids close. She grows still and languid. A pearly wedge gleams between her lips and she moans, a fragile piteous sound of pleasure" (18).

As evident by the above instances both Ice Candy Man and Masseur express their love through physical intimacy. This fondling of Ayah's body by both of her admirers is exposing both Ayah and Lenny to a very carnal, Eros, and physical nature of love. Lenny grows mature and learns the darker side of human nature. It is because of spending her time outside the house and observing Ayah's relationship with male characters that she is able to learn the various dynamics of love. Lenny observes, "I learn also to detect the subtle exchange of signals and some of the complex rites by which Ayah's admirers co-exist" (19). Lenny is extremely alert to the exchange of non-verbal cues between Ayah and her band of close admirers. "The covetous glance Ayah draws educate me" (3). Lenny's observations teach her about the complexities of love between men and women. This observation ignites in her a romantic yearning for which she unconsciously starts to seek a romantic partner.

The psychological effect of such advancements on Ice Candy Man is that they strengthen and develop his liking and feelings for Ayah. He tries to propose to her by offering her a gold coin

but Ayah refuses. Ayah's involvement with Ice Candy Man and Masseur including a range of other men is a clear moral and social transgression in a traditional patriarchal society. Her casual socializing with men expose her to many dangers she is not aware of. With the passage of the story she is constantly pursued by Ice Candy Man. "Where Masseur is, Ayah is. And where Ayah is, Ice Candy Man is" (123). Ayah's refusal of Ice Candy Man's love and her love affair with Masseur fills Ice Candy Man with a sense of profound loss and hurt. He uses the partition violence as an excuse to abduct Ayah. Her rape and sexual victimization is carried out in order to assuage his hurt ego. Ayah's sexual victimization and forceful prostitution of her body is reflective of Ice Candy Man's unfulfilled sexual advances that Ayah had refused in favour of Masseur. He punishes Masseur because Ayah loves him. Once the urge and passionate expression of love passes, Ice Candy Man transforms into a passive docile lover of his beloved Ayah. As Lenny observes, "He has changed from a chest-thrusting, paan-spitting and strutting *goonda* into a spitless poet" (245). His loss of self and ego is evident from the emotional dialogue he has with Godmother who scolds him for victimizing Ayah and threatens to take her away from his custody. He pulls his hair and exclaims in horror that: "I can't exist without her. Then rocking on his heels in his strange boneless ways he pounds his chest and pours fistful of dirt on his penitents head. "I am less than the dirt beneath her feet. I don't seek forgiveness" (251).

As evident, Ice Candy Man's loss of ego and self-negation reaches its peak by the end of the novel which can clearly be seen as a parallel to the transformation from passionate love to the compassionate love. His condition can also be a figurative display of the concept of "fana" according to the Sufi tradition. The probability of losing Ayah fills him with a deeper sense of loss which makes him lose his senses, aim and identity. Towards the end of the novel, Ayah decides to leave Ice Candy Man and cross the border into India. During the last few days of her stay in a

camp she often encounters Ice Candy Man who, in a state of semi madness, recites love poetry as she passes by. In Lenny's words, "When we walk past the Ice Candy Man, he greets us courteously and does not stare at Ayah, but casts his eyes down...He murmurs a couplet by another romantic poet Ghalib, Don't berate me, beloved, I'm God-intoxicated! I'll wrap myself about you; I'm mystically mad" (277).

In other words, Ice Candy Man's extremism becomes a source of loss, grief and psychological torment for Ayah. Ironically, after subjecting Ayah to unlimited and multifaceted violence, Ice Candy Man is again representing her as the victimizer, a cruel beloved who is not responding to the loving urges and pining of love by the lover. Just as Asghar in *Twilight in Delhi* represents Bilqeece as a merciless dame who has inflicted love upon him causing misery and sorrow. Interestingly, women in both instances, despite being passive objects of admiration, are presented as active agents of romance, thereby rendering them a position of power, and by doing so the male figures appear feminized and victimized. She does not want to see Ice Candy Man as he kills Masseur and brings disgrace on her. After Masseur's death, followed by her abduction, she secretly cries and trusts no one. As Lenny recounts, "I know there is an added dimension to her loss I cannot comprehend" (*Ice Candy Man* 181). Ayah's love story ends in tragedy causing irreparable loss, of hope and life. Her devastated condition signals the permanent damage love has placed on her psyche and emotions. Her condition alludes to women's deeper, emotional investment in love whose absence then produces equally grave feelings of loss.

In the Twilight of Love and Romance

The concept of love and romance has been deeply explored in *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmad Ali whose male protagonist, Asghar, is shown to be a young passionate romantic hero overwhelmed by love for Bilqeece, his friend's sister. Bilqeece, like Ayah or perhaps even more

than Ayah, is presented as a mute and passive receiver of love whereas Asghar expresses his romantic desires in multifaceted ways. He is introduced at the very beginning of the novel in the second chapter as he lays on the roof at night lost in sexual fantasies as “arms, legs and breasts form themselves out of the star. They become a beautiful woman” (15). Asghar imagines himself dancing with Mushtari Bai and later with Bilqeece and “dancing they fall into each other’s arms. Their mouths search each other and meet in a kiss” (15). He also experiences love as a painful emotion, full of sorrow and anguish. His conversation with his friend, Bari highlights the harrowing details of the suffering and loss he feels while pining for his beloved, “His beautiful eyes looked deep and sad with pain, and his fresh skin looked wrinkled and old. It’s all a question of fate, he said. There are sorrows and miseries which grip you in their claws and there seems no escape from them. We struggle, but we cannot get out of the net which fate has cast upon us” (31). Asghar’s helplessness in the face of love indicates that falling in love is something beyond human control.

His dejection and constant yearning for his beloved is often expressed in the novel. In another meeting with his friend, Asghar speaks of his beloved in the following words, “She is graceful as a cypress. Her hair is blacker than the night of separation, and her face is brighter than the hours of love” (32). Bilqeece, on the other hand, is never mentioned to experience such feelings. The stark absence of feminine romantic expression for a male beloved further works to strengthen the male prerogative of being dominant initiators of love and romance. Interestingly, Asghar had only seen Bilqeece once when she came downstairs. Unaware of his presence in the house, and finding herself face to face their eyes had met and, “seeing him she rushed inside. He had sat their wonder struck, overpowered with her beauty. Sometimes a fleeting glance goes more deeply home than a meeting” (33). Asghar’s love at first sight materializes into marriage, however,

his life remains a journey of loss and sorrow as Bilqeece dies shortly after marriage. Asghar's shift from Mushtari Bai to Bilqeece and finally to Zohra serves as the central focus of the romance narrative.

Asghar in *Twilight in Delhi* is shown to love three different women during the course of the novel. As the novel begins, he is shown to be in love with Mushtari Bai, a prostitute. He understands love as a passionate admiration of physical beauty as he enquires Mushtari Bai, "God has given you beauty and you have love, what else can a woman desire" (75). According to Asghar women yearn for the admiration of their physical beauty. Mushtari Bai in response negates the importance of physical beauty and yearns to possess the beauty of soul, thereby yearning for the compassionate expression of love. Asghar is shown to quickly proceed from Mushtari Bai to his next beloved, Bilqeece with whom he had fallen in love after a cursory glance at her house. Bilqeece, a typical Indian Muslim girl was brought up in an environment where emotions were strictly guarded. Romantic expressions and feeling of love and admirations were strictly prohibited especially for Bilqeece who was taught that, "passion is the worst kind of sin" (188). Bilqeece understands expressions of love and romance prior to marriage as evil and shameful. After marrying Asghar she fails miserably in romantically responding to her husband's needs. Her shyness and timidity in response to Asghar's passionate demands prove to be a major disappointment for Asghar who becomes disillusioned and indifferent to her.

Bilqeece's expression of love for her husband is always of a compassionate nature; during one of their conversations, she looks at him with "an expression of worship and love" (191). Her romantic expression is that of a compassionate worshipper, a devotee who is ready to humble herself to a state of complete self-abnegation before her master. Asghar on the other hand, expected a more passionate and physical expressions of love, "he wanted her to kiss him and caress him,

put her arms around his neck and whisper, I love you, I love you” (186). Asghar is desperate to imagine himself as a prince charming with whom Bilqeece is as passionately in love as he is with her. He fantasies himself as a Mughal prince, as Jahangir and Shah Jahan whose love narratives greatly inspire him. However, Bilqeece discloses that she was confused and ashamed about her feeling for Asghar. Her failure to express her love and admiration for him proves a great blow to his ego. He considers this as a rejection just as Ice Candy Man suffers insult on rejection by Ayah who overlooks his love and chooses to marry Masseur. Both women, Ayah and Bilqeece, hurt male egos and by not responding to the love and affection showered by their male lovers, call for trouble. “Asghar was disappointed. He had always loved to imagine that she was madly in love with him, was dying in grief with his absence” (187). As evident, Asghar was more in love with the idea that he was admired and yearned for by Bilqeece, who he imagined to be suffering and pining for his love, than actually being in love with Bilqeece. This highlights that Asghar being a man demanded love in response to his love from a woman whom he had chosen to love. Just as Ice Candy Man strictly expects Ayah to respond to his love.

Speaking in the context of romantic love, Beauvoir highlights that romantic love for men is not as threatening to self-worth and identity as it is for women. She goes on to explain that men may appear passionately in love, but, “they never abandon themselves completely...by contrast love for a woman is a total abdication for the benefit of a master” (773). This can be clearly seen as Ayah expresses her love for Masseur in the following words, “I am already yours, says Ayah with disturbing submission. I will always be yours” (*Ice Candy Man*, 158). As evident Ayah’s submission to Masseur is disturbing, i.e. disturbingly self-effacing. A similar feeling arises when Bilqeece in *Twilight in Delhi* suffers in agony due to her husband’s indifference towards her. She blames herself for displeasing him in some way. Asghar’s cold attitude towards his wife has

devastating effects on Bilqeece who, “felt that the world was falling to pieces all around her, and in the middle of the debris she stood without a friend” (213). Bilqeece’s love for Asghar is one of complete devotion, dependence and it defines her existence. Without his love she becomes desperately sick. Her love proves to be an illusion and a gap begins to appear between illusion and reality. Her prince charming fails to provide a happy ever after ending and overcome by the fear of losing the love she had most keenly invested in, Bilqeece is driven deep into a world of despair: “Bilqeece felt as if she had dropped the looking glass in which she had been looking and it was shattered to pieces, and her own image was broken into particles of glass” (216). Thus, love for Bilqeece was clearly rooted through abdication of self, whereas for Asghar it was a violent passion that washed through body and soul and receded as violently as it had come. This echoes the words of Firestone, “Male culture was and is parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women without reciprocity” (qtd. in Baruch 4). Asghar feeds on the emotions of Bilqeece without reciprocating thereby causing misery in the name of love.

For Asghar, Bilqeece’s death causes a temporary guilt and sorrow after which he moves on. He is capable of growing out of love and falling in love more easily and frequently. According to him, “love is something spontaneous. It is the fire which once alight cannot be put out. But once it begins to smoulder and die, nothing on earth can revive it again” (*Twilight in Delhi* 214). His love for Bilqeece was spontaneous just as spontaneous as his love for Zohra, “A storm of emotion rose in him also; and his sadness was changed into desire, his self-pity into love” (255). Asghar falls in love with Zohra shortly after Bilqeece’s death and desires to marry her. Unlike Bilqeece, love for him, being a man in a male dominated society is used as a medium to cater to his carnal desires.

In addition to this, Ice Candy man and Asghar both understand and express love through sexual imagery and physical intimacy. Asghar's sensual imagination of dancing with various naked women at the beginning of the chapter as he lies lost in the starry sky at night, shows how men channel love through physical and sexual intimacy. Ice Candy Man similarly displays great liberty in physically approaching Ayah's body. Holding, touching and closely following her, Ice Candy Man's presence becomes a disturbing perusal of Ayah, creating an overpowering and suffocating feelings for both Lenny and Ayah. As Lenny observes during their visit to the zoo as Ice Candy Man secretly follows them, "He conceals himself behind the Peacocks. When they spread their tail feathers and open their turquoise eyes: he has as many eyes and they follow us" (121). This again conjures the image of sexual and physical vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society where they are at a greater risk of being sexually exploited in the name of love.

After Bilqeece dies Asghar once again falls in love with Zohra, Bilqeece's younger sister. Interestingly, Asghar also chooses physical intimacy as a means to reassure her of his love. Towards the end of the novel, Zohra comes to Asghar's house and he takes the opportunity to express his love to her, "having set my hear afire with the music of your presence . . . having lighted the flame of love in the night of my life, you wish now to keep away from me . . . She tried to pass but Asghar caught hold of her in his arms. She struggled for a while then relaxed in his embrace" (258). Asghar again highlights Zohra and her physical beauty as the active agent that has willingly captured the helpless Asghar in its snare. Zohra, on the contrary, denies any wilful action as she says, "I did not mean anything, Zohra says looking at her feet" (257). Zohra is made to believe that she has in some ways inflicted love upon Asghar, causing him grief and misery therefore, the only solution would be to marry him to appease his pain and longings. In addition to this, by elevating the female figure to the level of giver of love and Asghar as a beggar in the name

of love the male figure creates the illusion of love as an act of mercy, charity and kindness. This emotional exploitation works with Zohra who agrees to marry Asghar. However, it does not work with Ayah who refuses to bestow love as mercy and generosity to the beggar like Ice Candy Man and chooses to desert him.

Zohra's love for Asghar is masked by pity, sorrow, confusion and guilt. She pities and feels sorry for him for having to look after his young daughter all alone. Interestingly she is more overwhelmed by the urge to mother his motherless daughter than by romantic passionate yearnings for Asghar. It would not be wrong to claim that whereas Asghar sexually fantasies the young Zohra, she, on the contrary, responds to his love as channelled through fear, guilt, pity and the urge to mother his child. Zohra is scorned for fostering romantic feelings for Asghar and married away in haste to someone else. Once again Asghar's love for Zohra, like Mushtari Bai and Bilqeece remains predominant and is articulated, explained and even physically enacted in the form of an embrace, whereas Zohra remains painfully silent, shy and passive. Her exposure and experience of love is short-lived, emotionally confused, ambiguous and rooted in loss. Love's inextricable link with loss clearly manifests in all of the life trajectories examined. Mushtari Bai as a prostitute is never allowed to see love beyond lust and sexual gratification at the expense of her own body and therefore feels loss and misery. Bilqeece and Zohra both are too timid and socially programmed to fear and avoid love. Their miserable life results in loss and sorrow. Ayah is punished by Ice Candy Man who demands her to respond to his love. She loses her beloved, freedom and identity.

Conclusion

Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) asserts that,

On the day when it would be possible for a woman to love not in her weakness, but in her strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself - on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger. In the meantime, love represents in its most touching form the curse that lies heavily upon women confined in the feminine universe, woman mutilated, insufficient unto herself. (4)

The above quotation by de Beauvoir aptly sums up the complex nuances that love holds for women within patriarchal societies. As exemplified through Ayah, to love outside the bonds of marriage is perhaps the most dangerous territory to tread upon. Her abduction, rape, prostitution and forceful marriage are the violent repercussions faced by a woman who dares to boldly assert her sexual desires in a society governed by and for male desires. On the other hand, Bilqeece's tragic life shows how men in patriarchal societies project their romantic desires onto women who in turn love with their soul and heart. However, as Asghar's romantic fantasies dull away, revealing the fake illusions of love, he becomes indifferent to her, thus causing her to suffer from sorrow and fatal grief, resulting in loss and death. This highlights the fact that for women in patriarchal societies, love and romance means complete devotion, to the extent that women often completely negate themselves.

Men on the other hand, as exemplified by Asghar's character are shown to transcend and evolve, turning love into a journey of self-discovery, being more in control as compared to women who lose themselves in the illusion of love sacrificing for their master. It is here that women need to realize how patriarchy emotionally exploits them in making love a journey of loss, sacrifice and surrender. It is precisely this that women need to change just as Beauvoir urges that women need to make love a journey of self-discovery like Ayah whose assertive attitude towards the end of the novel was the first step she took to put a stop to her sexual objectification in the name of love. Her

decision to assert herself came after a heavy price of abasement she faced at the hands of Ice Candy Man. Ayah's psychological and emotional growth in love stems out of the grief and loss she experiences in the name of love. Not only Ayah, but Lenny too experiences love as a complex emotion steeply rooted in loss and sorrow. It may be safely concluded that love is mostly presented as a psychological, transformational journey that is rooted through loss and accompanied by sorrow and grief.

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Bringing Home Abjection: Honour, Female Body and Religion in

Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman*

Sumera Khalil

Abstract

The current study focuses on the contemporary Pakistani women's struggle for identity through a textual analysis of Qaisra Shahraz *The Holy Woman*. It draws on Julia Kristeva's perspective on abjection³ and its relation to the assertion of one's identity. The text offers rich insights into the much politicized and marginalized position of women, an issue in dire need of further re-evaluation. In Qaisra Shahraz's novel, the protagonist Zarri Bano comes of an influential feudal family and is married to the Holy Quran in order to keep the old tradition alive. The study highlights the problems faced by the protagonist, first as a woman and then as a part of the larger social, political and religious structure and the manner in which she is reduced to *abject* by the 'ordered system/s'. Kristeva's perspective on abjection constitutes a phenomenon that "disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers of Horror* 4). This disturbance of identity can be located in this novel where the position of this multi-dimensionally marginalized 'specie' is always punctuated with a question mark. The study marks a critical shift from the current feminist preoccupation with the 'transgressive potentiality' of 'encounters with the abject' to a consideration of the consequences of 'being abject'. In a country with an abysmally poor women rights record, feminism has always been a matter of intense debate and discussion. However, this study highlights the fact that not all women in the society are treated the same way. Among the variety of characters present in the novel, there are racist characters, marginalized personas and more complicated abject beings such as Zarri Bano.

Keywords: abjection, abject, feminism, religion, marginalization, identity, feudalism, feudal, status of women

Introduction

I am the one you hid beneath
the weight of traditions
For you never knew
that light can never fear pitch darkness

"Who Am I?" by Kishwar Naheed

This suggestive and touching piece of poetry by Kishwar Naheed, one of the most celebrated Pakistani feminist poets, voices the predicament of women in Pakistani society. It is a

³ Abject is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as 'Brought low, miserable, craven, degraded, despicable, self-abusing'. Thus, abjection becomes a 'state of misery or degradation.'

female voice raised against the manipulations and mistreatments women suffer at the hands of their male counterparts. It sounds like a scream in a society where little acknowledgment and recognition is given to the women as individuals. It is a protest against the society in which their existence is defined in deference to the male members of their respective clans. It speaks of a society where if a woman rebels against the norms, she is deprived of her basic human right to a peaceful life. The elevation of male domination, privilege and honour presents Pakistan as a patriarchal society where the exploitation and maltreatment of women is justified in the name of traditions, norms, religion, culture and honour (izzat). Pakistani society is one of those societies where men are respected and considered dignified and strong from the time that they are born, while women have to struggle in order to win even basic human rights, and despite their struggles, there is absolutely no guarantee that they will be entitled to the same privileges available to men. Our society is one of its own kind where women are always thought of and talked about as personal commodities and mere bodies whereas men are taken as individuals with a particular identity. In such a society, it is almost unimaginable for a woman to move around in the public sphere without being made conscious of her body. This is largely due to the male gaze and the looks of the strangers that she has to endure in her daily life. A woman's whole existence remains under strict inspection and scrutiny both at home and outside. At home this scrutiny is exercised by the dominant and powerful male figures of her family that include not only her father and brother/s but also other male members. This ongoing struggle of Pakistani women to get acknowledged and recognized as intelligent individuals of society if not equal to men has still to go a long way. She has to constantly deal with all the hurdles and obstacles including cultural traditions, religious manipulation and the feudal system.

Qaisra Shahraz is an award-winning, widely praised writer and dramatist. She was born in Pakistan, but has lived in the UK since childhood. Just like all the other Pakistani writers residing in foreign countries, Shahraz also tries to forge connections with her country through her writings. Through her writings, she also represents the turmoil and the social issues that women living in Pakistan face. The social subjugation of women in this part of the world constitutes the main theme of her novels. Another significant issue dealt by Shahraz is the constant struggle of Muslim women living in the West for the assertion of their identity. *A Pair of Jeans* by Qaisra Shahraz particularly deals with this clash of Muslim values with the western culture. Muhammad Asim Siddiqui comments on Shahraz's diasporic distinctiveness, her viewpoint and her outlook on patriarchy in Pakistani culture in an interview:

Pakistan never disappeared from Qaisra Shahraz's imaginative space. The diasporic identity has its own advantages . . . the abundance of experience Pakistani and Western She redefines feminism for Pakistani society, call it Islamic feminism or Muslim feminism . . . Her target is the agrarian system, some oppressive customs in Sindh and the subversion of Islam to serve one's own interest. (2)

Shahraz gained degrees in English and European writing and is known as one of the hundred most persuasive Pakistani female novelists of her times. Her novels showcase the plight of Pakistani women. *The Holy Woman* is based in the rural part of Pakistan and is about the repressive customs that persecute women such as their forced marriage to Quran. Shahraz as a feminist Pakistani writer plays an important role in inscribing and defining the identity of women within Pakistani society. The main theme of *The Holy Woman* is the centuries old custom of marrying the eldest daughter to Quran which helps the feudal lords to keep their lands and wealth intact in the absence of any male heir. Through Zarri Bano's character, Shahraz unveils various heinous and dark secrets

of the feudal system in our society. Zarri Bano and Shahzada (her mother) play leading roles in the novel. Zarri is compelled by her father to become a 'holy woman' to secure the land and respect of the family. Zarri gives up all she had in her life including her lover and her freedom. She turns into a 'holy woman', and at the end succeeds in dismantling the myth of tradition. She, along with the other characters like Firdous, Kaneez and Shahzada, experiences the same type of male dominance where all decision and final laws are formed by the males.

The paper focuses on Pakistani women's struggle for identity as represented in Shahraz's novel *The Holy Woman*. The story of women surviving within the confines of strict patriarchal boundaries have long been the subject of Pakistani fiction in English. These women hail from different religions, castes and social classes. The paper draws on Kristeva's perspective of abjection and its relation to the assertion of one's identity in her book *Powers of Horror*. Julia Kristeva is a Bulgarian-French writer, feminist and philosopher. Kristeva has become an influential figure in the field of psychoanalysis and feminism. Her ample collection of works include novels and essays which talk about abjection and semiotics in linguistics, politics and autobiography. The English translation of *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980) laid the foundation of the emergence of the concept of abject/abjection in 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* is a book containing features of philosophy and psychoanalysis and has a great impact on the reader. Rarely has the publication of a single book had such an impact on an enormous sphere of academic discipline as well as in cultural production. The influence of *Powers of Horror* was largely a result of the way in which feminist theorists in the 1980s and 1990s assumed the Kristevian abject, addressing it as an empowering concept for feminist research.

Powers of Horror is a theoretical explanation of the mental roots and devices of repulsion and repugnance. Kristeva advances the idea of the abject as definition and explanation for temporal

and spatial disturbances within the life of the subject, particularly in the moments when the subject goes through a terrifying loss of dissimilarity between itself and objects/others. The abject designates those practices that are divergent and disturb the conscious ego, the 'I'. It is the region between being and non-being, "the border of my condition as a living being" (3). Kristeva is also of the view that abjection can be the mechanical and political acts of insertion/elimination which constitute the basis of social existence. Kristeva opines that the abject has a dual existence, it is both in 'us' and within the culture and it is via discretely individual and group rituals of exclusion that abjection is 'acted out'. Abjection therefore spawns the social and individual borders. For Kristeva, the abject becomes a reason for disruption of social order.

The Holy Woman as an *Abject*: An analysis

Abject is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as "[b]rought low, miserable, craven, degraded, despicable, self-abusing". Thus, *Abjection* becomes 'state of misery or degradation'. Yet, these explanations remain vague and inexplicit unless put in a proper context as Julia Kristeva has treated it in her book *Power of Horror*. If we then explore abjection in social, cultural and religious contexts, we will find that abjection is expressed in religious abhorrence, Oedipus and Electra Complexes (incest), female bodies, sacrifices at altar, body fluids, murder, dead bodies, cannibalism, decaying and all such unnatural human activities. Hence, abject is considered to be an outcast as it continuously threatens a collapse of meaning. This aspect of the abject is evidently present in *The Holy Woman* where the female protagonist is ostracized once and for all because she happens to be a threat to the norms and traditions of society and constantly refers to the collapse of meaningful patriarchy. Lacan's concept of the Law of the father or the point where the child enters the symbolic order of the patriarch, a concept widely pervasive in Pakistani society also constitutes the main idea of this paper.

It is pertinent here to trace a link between Kristeva's concept of abjection and the novel on which this theory is being applied. The protagonist Zarri Bano is a young lady who is struggling against the 'law of the father' or patriarchal structures to develop and sustain her individual identity. Her revolt or war is on numerous levels. Kristevan concept of abjection involves a state of rebellion or a war against our realization of our sense or state of being or existence as is evident in the case of Zarri Bano. Her battle against political, social, cultural and religious manipulation is evident. It is her continuous struggle and torment which links her to the Kristevan concept of 'abjection'.

The textual analysis of the novel *The Holy Woman* helps in establishing the fact that both at the macrocosmic (national) and microcosmic (domestic) level, women are confined within the four walls of their domestic sphere in the name of religion which is then used as a tool of exploitation. Women are thereby denied any agency and forced to lead a circumscribed existence. The direction and scope of women's lives is largely determined by cultural traditions and religious codes which are interpreted in the language of men whether they are the Mullahs, rulers or the men at home. Female characters in the novel are well aware of this repression and maltreatment and are shown resisting it. Each character's struggle showcases the patriarchal constraints, autocracy and controls which hinder the avowal of their identity. Shahraz highlights the predicament and the struggle of these female characters, and also suggests possible escape routes. Eventually, the resilience of these characters to fight these odds becomes a beacon of hope for women in general.

The aim of this paper, consequently, is to shed light on the various ways in which the women in the novel are shown entangled in the complications existing in contemporary Pakistani society. Furthermore, this study probes into the strong patriarchal system that is a hazard in the way of female struggle of establishing her individual identity by gaining a control over her desires,

motives and acts. The novel also highlights the issues that lead to women's religious, physical, sexual and psychological victimization.

Religious Abjection and Honour: *Shahzadi Ibadat*

'All I know is that,' she pinched a fold of burqa in front of Sakina, 'with this cloth, Zarri Bano is dead. The woman who lived in this room for the past twenty-seven years, is gone. I have been stripped of my identity and a stranger is taking my place. I am, at this moment in time, wrestling with the death and mourning of one woman, while preparing in fear for the birth and rise of another.' (Shahraz146)

How many of us have heard of the concept of a holy woman? 'Holy Woman' or 'Shahzadi Ibadat' in Urdu, is an old tradition which is common among the feudal landlords of the Sindh province in Pakistan. According to this tradition, the eldest daughter is married to the Quran if there are no male heirs. A woman is married to the holy book (Quran) in an official ritualistic ceremony. Once this ritual is performed, the woman is expected to become celibate, unsexual and dedicate her life to religion. The motive of the custom is to keep the wealth and property in the family and save it from going out of the family by marrying the daughters to other men. This tradition is practiced in the name of religion but it is actually against religious teachings, as Islam prohibits celibacy. Qaisra Shahraz's novel *The Holy Woman* captures the misery, torment and torture forced on the women living in accordance with strict patriarchal norms. This novel shows how the feudal system, cultural traditions and social norms are used by men to control women's freedom.

The Holy Woman is focused on Zarri Bano, a cultured and rich woman, who falls prey to a feudal convention. The twenty-seven-year-old Zarri Bano, a university graduate and an active

feminist who is a member of the woman's organization at her university is emotionally black mailed by her father to marry the Holy Quran and become a Holy Woman. Overnight, Zarri Bano is transformed into a Quran bride or *Shahzadi Ibadat*. Her father Habib Khan, a feudal lord, delivers this painful verdict after the unanticipated death of the only heir of the family, his son and Zari Bano's brother Jafar. This is done with the prime motive of keeping the family fortune within the family. Zarri Bano unwillingly accepts her new role but modifies it according to her own desires and travels abroad for higher education. The plot reaches its climactic moment as Ruby, her younger sister, gets married to Sikandar, Zarri Bano's love. This marriage ends shortly as Ruby tragically dies during the Holy pilgrimage performed in Mecca. Zarri Bano is again emotionally persuaded to marry Sikandar in order to mother her orphaned nephew Harris. Her father Habib Khan, however, once again asserts his control by denying his daughter the choice of marriage. This way, he is in essence negating the demands of female sexuality in the interests of male impulses and desires to control the lives of women. The novel illustrates the plight of a Pakistani "woman has no say in any aspect of her own life, including her marriage, and once betrothed belongs exclusively to her husband's family" (Mumtaz and Shaheed 21).

Female Body and Honour as Agents of Abjection

Abjection is the central feature of *The Holy Woman*, particularly Zarri Bano's whole existence is merely abject. Her transformation from a woman leading a modern and liberal lifestyle to her becoming *Shahzadi Ibadat*, reflects her state of abjection. Initially her father treats her like a son and lets her study in a university and stay in a hostel in another bigger and modern city which is quite contrary to the traditions and norms of a rural village as Tando Adam. After the death of her brother Jafar, Zarri Bano has to be sacrificed as *Shahzadi Ibadat*, in pursuance of a tradition which has nothing to do with logic as it only wastes a human life. Zarri Bano's life in the beginning

is smooth and she enjoys the perks of her liberty till the time when one physical death (her brother's) causes many other deaths that she has to experience including mental, psychological, sexual, emotional and social deaths. It is at this point that Zarri Bano acknowledges that she is actually going to experience death: "Here I stand before you, Mother, my father's Shahzadi Ibadat. She spread her hands in a flourish. The Holy Woman. The woman he created by killing me" (88). As she becomes the very embodiment of Kristeva's concept of the abject, she states: "Did you not know that men are the true creators in our culture, Mother? They mould our lives and destinies according to their whims and desires" (88). Here Zarri Bano crosses the "imaginary boundary" described by Kristeva and enters into "the realm of death, mutilation, blood and horror" (Kristeva 2). Hence, Zarri Bano goes through the physical 'door of traditions' and over the misty threshold which stands between her 'state of being' and the life that awaits her. Subsequently, her father wields complete control and authority over the laws governing her existence; she as a 'subject' is manipulated to such an extent that she loses touch with reality and her state of mind is severely impacted and destabilized. The chapter '*Ceremony of marrying to Quran*' is highly suggestive and forms the core of the whole novel. We see a human being stripped of her identity and life. This chapter is in direct contrast to the rest of the novel. We are told that Zarri Bano was to be made a proper bride. However, the way she tears apart her bridal dress and removes her accessories is the first realization of the fear that will consume her entire life and existence. She becomes the very embodiment of the condition Kristeva's describes in her work, when she writes: "I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me . . ." (3). Zarri Bano experiences the same sense of abnegation at the time of becoming *The Holy Woman*. This climactic scene forms a pivot around which the rest of the novel revolves.

Zarri Bano confronts the 'abject' in the form of another Shahzadi Ibadat, a woman by the name of Sakina. When she first sees her clad in a black robe, she feels like throwing up. Nausea, according to Kristeva is the first stage of encountering abject. It is the first and most sudden reaction to the bizarre situation. Zarri Bano takes scissors and tears apart all her colourful dresses because she has confronted the colour 'black', the colour she has to wear for the rest of her life. Kristeva characterizes such events as the "spasms or vomiting that protect me" (2).

Defiled Patriarchy and Abjection in *The Holy Woman*

Another important aspect of abjection that Kristeva suggested and that can be traced in *The Holy Woman* is that of 'defilement'. In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva brings the subject of defilement in relation to the act of 'incest'. Kristeva relates 'religion' with the rituals and states that "[t]he function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject's fear of his/her very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother" (64). Although in *The Holy Woman*, we do not find any direct traces of incest yet there are words, acts and doings which are suggestive that such a force might be at the back of Habib's (Zarri Bano's father) mind. He, in the first place, never wanted his daughter to be married to Sikandar who was an eligible suitor for Zarri Bano. From the initial chapters till the end, Habib himself is bewitched by the beauty of his daughter and we find strong streaks of jealousy in him when Zarri Bano falls in love with Sikandar and wants to marry him. From his dictatorship, "You forget, Shahzada, in our clan, destinies are made and directed by us" (23) to his jealousy of Sikandar, "That conceited bastard was more concerned with biscuits than my daughter. He barely glanced at my Zarri Bano! Men have been falling in love with her beauty since she was a teenager" (23), this factor is evident. Habib proves to be a strange father. His questioning of Shahzada in sending Zarri Bano to Sikandar's house and also his motive to make Zarri Bano 'Shahzadi Ibadat' reveals the fact that he did not want his daughter to get married

in the first place. He also accuses Zarri Bano of being too driven by her sexual desires “to be with a man” which is not becoming of a father. Kristevan concept of defilement is “an element connected with the boundary, the margin, etc, of an order” (66). Whatever is happening in *The Holy Woman* is the defiling system and order where we see a human getting married to a Holy Book. The whole ceremony of converting Zarri Bano into ‘Shahzadi Ibadat’ serves as an evidence of this defiled persona. The ceremony starts and Zarri Bano is adorned with all the fineries and ornaments. She looks at herself, “Is that me? Zarri Bano asked in bemusement, staring at the mocking bridal image in front of her” (141). The real climax is when she removes all the embellishments from her body in utter dismay:

Inside the room, Zarri Bano threw the burqa off onto the bed. With quick deft movements, she removed each piece of jewelry from her neck, ears, arms and fingers. Slipping out of the red bridal outfit, comprising of a long sequined pleated skirt, with a short matching tunic, she stood tall in her ivory silk slip in front of the mirror and surveyed herself. Next she unpinned the wavy coils of her hair piled high in a becoming regal style. Shaking her head, Zarri Bano let the heavy silky curtain fall around her shoulders. She gazed at herself for long poignant seconds in the mirror, etching forever the picture of her face onto her mind. (146-147)

Her mindlessness does not end here as she continues to ‘defile’ herself and seek revenge from her own beauty:

Then, taking a large pair of scissors from the dressing-table drawer and holding her hair in a heavy bunch at the top of her head, Zarri Bano sheared it across with a strong steady movement. Eight inches of glossy hair fluttered in feathery bunches on to the marble floor.

Zarri Bano glanced again at the image in the mirror. Like a newly hatched chicken, her hair stuck out in an unbecoming style around her face. (147)

Kristeva states that “defilement will now be that which impinges on symbolic oneness, that is, sham substitutions, doubles, idols” (104). Zarri Bano abhors her state of ‘cleanliness and beauty’ so she shuns what is attractive in her and defaces herself by cutting her hair and by hiding behind a ‘burqa’, a black robe.

Another abject aspect is the mention of Zarri Bano’s beauty by her father and also by Sikandar who is enthralled by her beautiful face. Habib is reluctant to get his daughter married, arguing instead that she is too beautiful to find a perfect match for herself. Also, that converting her to Shahzadi Ibadat will keep the honour, beauty and wealth inside the house.

The Holy Woman is an example that there has been a profound void of religious authority, where one does not know who is talking about religion and how. Traditionally, institutions have decentralized Islamic law and Islamic epistemology has tolerated a variety of opinions and schools of thought. Islamic law was generated at the national level neither by the government nor by any other institution, but by judges and lawyers for a slow, creative, indefinite dialectic that was somewhat similar to the common law system (Waqas et al). This is mainly due to the standards being so low that even a person, who has a modest amount of knowledge of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, is classified as sufficient to represent the Shariah.

The Semiotic Holy Woman and the Symbolic Patriarch

Kristeva’s main concern remains with the identity of the ‘subject’ under discussion. According to her, the easy way of achieving one’s true identity is through language. Another aspect through which Kristeva explains her concept of ‘abjectness’ is the ‘semiotic and the ‘symbolic’. The semiotic and the symbolic in Kristevan terms are basically two symbiotic facets of language.

Speakers' innate drives, motives and impulses or to term them as matriarchal features of language fall under the semiotic. The character's use of imagery, the tone and undertone of what they say or do and the rhythm of their dialogues is manifested through these subconscious drives. This semiotic or symbiotic aspect of their language is oppressed and crushed by the society in general and by the lingual aspect known as patriarchal is what Kristeva calls 'symbolic'. To be more exact, "in Kristevian schemes, the social is always oppressive" (Jones 58). The grammatical constructions and syntactic edifices form the rule-governed or symbolic aspect of language. The 'symbolic' always takes over 'the semiotic' and thus remains powerful. A strong part of semiotic is the figurative language "structural linguistics, operating on phonological oppositions or on two axes of metaphor and metonymy, accounts for some of the articulation, operating in what we have called the semiotic" (Kristeva 41).

The reason for bringing in this debate about 'the semiotic' and 'the symbolic' is that there is a constant battle going on between Zarri Bano being 'the semiotic' and her father being 'the symbolic' in the novel. The war starts right after the situation when the father realizes that Zarri Bano is making independent choices about the kind of man she wants to marry in her life. In an argument with Zarri's mother, he insists, "I am the head of the family and *I* will decide what is good for my Zarri Bano" (23). This assertive tone continues throughout the novel. The 'semiotic' and 'symbolic' face each other when Habib Khan tells Zarri Bano that she will be made 'Shahzadi Ibadat'. The tone, undertone and underlying meanings of their discourse foreground the abject role decided by Zarri's father for her. The long sentences by Zarri Bano to deny the fact of what she is becoming in the guise of Shahzadi Ibadat, are negated by shrewd short replies from her father. The moment when he tells her about her 'new role' as the 'Holy Woman', she replies, "I know what it entails and I am not cut out for that role" (79). To which, her father's reply is, "You

will grow into the role soon enough” (79). She calls it ‘madness’ but he is consistent in his decision and is well-aware of the power that he owns. The final point is where he denies her the right of marriage at all. “There will be no marriage ceremony for you. I will not grant permission for you to marry this man or any other man, Zarri Bano, *EVER*” (80). Here, the ‘symbolic’ completely takes over the ‘semiotic’, the point where Zarri Bano does what the women of her clan had been doing for centuries. She surrenders to the role of an *Islamic Nun*. The dilemma here is that these men have themselves given this power and finality to their words. No religion supports them so they give their own interpretation of religion. In *The Holy Woman* as well, Habib Khan is unable to convince his intelligent and learned daughter with reason so he uses ‘power’ and ‘authority’ instead. This power of Habib Khan as father and all other male clan of their family leave the females of the family paralyzed and helpless, as Gulshan, one of Zarri Bano’s cousins says: “What could she do, anyway, if Zarri Bano’s own mother and sister had been powerless to help? She cast a surreptitious glance at her grandfather, her uncle Habib and her father. . . Gulshan was a mere young woman, was just a pebble in the company of giant rocks, to be easily trodden upon and crushed if the need arose” (152).

The world of *The Holy Woman* is abject at its core, yet there is hope at the end of the novel. The traces of abjection in *The Holy Woman* help to explore the ‘subconscious’ and ‘conscious’ of a liberal woman who is thrashed into a secluded and restricted life. This novel is also provocative for the reader in terms of affording her possibilities outside of the moral confines of traditional society.

The Sublime Holy Woman

The current study and analysis of female characters in *The Holy Woman* reveals male desire to control women’s bodies, identities and sexuality. This scenario converts women into play-

grounds or battle-fields where men conduct their warfare and, in the process, cultivate their masculinity and dominance. The inner desire to revolt and assert their own identity, and the fact that they are culturally and traditionally bound to carry out socially constructed male-dominated and male-oriented obligations, stirs a constant emotional and mental turmoil in women and keeps them disoriented and dismayed. There is a constant battle going on between women of this society and the society itself which is constituted by men. Uzma Aslam Khan opines, “In Pakistan, this on-going battle involves her sexuality, marriage, mobility, work, dress - so much about which is heard rarely from herself. Local religious zealots control her in the name of Islam; the west controls her in the name of freedom. She is never consulted: Why should she be, when she has no intellect, no artistry? She does not belong to herself but to others” (Khan 2009). Women wish to be acknowledged as individual beings, to choose a life partner or simply pursue a career, and eventually lead a life of their own choice.

Zarri Bano is initially helpless before her feudal minded father’s overwhelming desire to decide her fate. She remains silent and surrenders easily to the decisions taken by Habib Khan and other male members of their clan. She says: “I am not only your daughter or my father’s daughter, I am me! But you and Father have brutally stripped me of my identity as a normal woman and instead reduced me to a role of a puppet. . . . You have all jailed and numbed me into a commitment which I will have to go along with – but not willingly” (65).

It is only by the end of the novel that she finally realizes and asserts her identity in order to marry Sikandar. Qaisra takes gigantic steps through her account by penning down not only the sufferings and pangs of contemporary Pakistani women but also suggesting possible solutions to their life long sufferings.

A very subtle and important theme in *The Holy Woman* is that of suffering, purgation and forgiveness. This theme is closely related to Kristeva's concept of the 'sublime'. Almost all protagonists of the novel cross the route of suffering to reach purgatory and are forgiven or forgive to attain the realm of the 'Real'. Coming down to Zarri Bano's character in *The Holy Woman*, the reader sees her at the pinnacle of liberty and free choice when they first meet her. It is after the death of her brother, the only male heir in the family that her sufferings start. Hence, ironically the reader unlike Zarri Bano knows about the hidden motif of her father. She surrenders to the Law of the father following the symbolic order and presents herself for the ritualistic sacrifice at the altar. Zarri Bano goes through a series of sufferings where she lives a secluded life. She is forced to wear 'burqa' to veil her identity and to kill what her real self. Eventually she comes out of purgatory all pious and pure. Her very persona changes so does her purpose of life. Although she marries Sikandar yet that marriage is not the culmination of a bond of love but so that she can bring up her deceased sister's child to be the next heir of the property.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is also noticeable that Kristeva names one side of 'abject' as 'jouissance' which is equivalent to being joyous or happy. To her, it is only due to this feeling that "one thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims-if not its submissive and willing ones" (Kristeva 9). The Kristevan theory used in relation to the selected novel sums up that "the abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law, but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to defy them" (Kristeva 15). The abject woman becomes a manipulator, and thereby subverts rules, boundaries, conventional laws and traditions. Hence, we find our protagonist struggling to assert what her true 'being' is. In this process, she finds her way by the end of the novel but only after a hard and

gruelling battle. Zarri Bano marries Sikandar and finds a normal family yet she has lost the romantic love she had for him or the urge of living a life of her dreams. The sole purpose of her life now has become the upbringing of Haris. Her character remains ambivalent like all those women in our society who are struggling to earn an individual identity without being victimized or marginalized. They yet have to get through a long trail of struggle.

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Remapping Bangladesh: A Palimpsestic Approach to Tehmima Anam's Bengal Trilogy

Habiba Ikram

Abstract

This paper explores the significance of Tehmima Anam's Bengal Trilogy including *A Golden Age* (2007), *The Good Muslim* (2011), and *The Bones of Grace* (2016) as palimpsestic texts. The main aim of this research is to prove that by remapping particular places in her trilogy, Anam adds another unique layer to the history of Bangladesh. Anam's rewriting of the 1971 conflict leads to an exploration of these events as seen through the eyes of an ordinary family. Selected palimpsest aspects, especially those related to geography and the role played by memory in the post 1971 conflict are taken as key theoretical approaches in this research. This research analyzes three major female characters, Rehana, Maya and Zubaida, and some minor male characters such as Sohail and Joy to explore two aspects: firstly, how they are portrayed in the text and secondly their association with Bangladesh's history and what makes them distinctive in the light of the selected theoretical approaches. The paper delineates some of the key features of the palimpsestic approach such as superimposed structures, overwriting and rewriting of certain events, reinscription of certain ideas, remapping or reconstruction of particular places and the special role of memory or recalling of an event in Anam's Bengal Trilogy to show how the novel emerges as a palimpsest text when seen in this light as well as a unique, complex and highly suggestive piece of writing.

Keywords: palimpsest, remapping, reinscription, recalling

The city is provisionally created as a patchwork quilt of individual viewpoints and opinions. The created order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order.

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Tehmima Anam's approach to past history (specially the crucial period for Bangladesh i.e. 1970-71) in her three novels *A Golden Age* (2007), *The Good Muslim* (2011) and *The Bones of Grace* (2016), which together form her Bengal trilogy, employs the palimpsest technique in such a way that multiple layers of meaning open up for readers and they are introduced to the various possibilities of investigating a single event from a multiplicity of perspectives. After the

independence of Bangladesh in 1971, various places were reconstructed or rebuilt by the new government, which signifies the multi-layered concept of palimpsest in which each layer is superimposed by another one. Palimpsest enforces the idea of reinscription in literature where writers rewrite existing history or any other concept in a different form. Anam deliberately rewrites the history of Bangladesh to make the contemporary situation more comprehensible. The aim of my research is to delineate the various elements of palimpsest in the three novels while analyzing the situation of Bangladesh after the conflict of 1971.

Anam explores the history of her country, Bangladesh, by interviewing her relatives and acquaintances who are the first hand witnesses of this crucial period of history. Her Bengal trilogy comprises of *A Golden Age* (2007), which has Rehana Haque (the mother of the family) as the narrator, *The Good Muslim* (2011), which includes Maya Sheherzad Haque's point of view, who is the daughter of Rehana and *The Bones of Grace* (2016), which presents Zubaida Haque's thinking process as the daughter of the previous narrator, Maya. She has also drawn many characters based on her relatives who actively participated in the political events shaping the history of Bangladesh at that time.

Anam highlights the idea that the major events of history affect the lives of different individuals differently and their ways of interpreting such events also foreground the concept of multiple narratives. This leads to a layered conceptualization of history, similar to a palimpsest where each layer is superimposed by another layer, but where the traces of the previous one remain forever. Palimpsest approach highlights the idea that all writing takes place in the presence of other writings, similarly there are multiple interpretations of a single word or event.

I have used a qualitative research methodology which further utilizes textual analysis and comparative study. In this research I have tried to put together the writer's main motivation behind

the remapping of particular places of Bangladesh through specific characters and its connection with the palimpsest approach.

Hassan Askari Rizvi's outlook on the creation of Bangladesh holds all the leaders of the time (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Yahya Khan, and Sheikh Mujib) responsible for the devastating consequences and calls it their failure to arrive at a middle ground. Subhrendu Shekhar Bhattacharjee's approach is more sympathetic towards Awami League of Bangladesh as he justifies the violence generated by Mukti Bahinis to the non-conformist elements. Anam not only spotlights those turning points of history (Operation searchlight, General Tikka Khan's violent approach to forcibly control the situation, Sheikh Mujib's 7th March 1970 speech, and the treaty between army chief commanders of both territories), but also their impact on the psyche of an ordinary family. Anam's artistic approach to history is evident when she portrays the palimpsestic qualities of places (Shaheed Minar, Louis Khan Parliament, Dhaka, and Chittagong port) and characters' memory associated with the events that took place there. She, somehow, blames those events not only for the disintegration of Pakistan but also for the disintegration of families. Her rewriting revitalizes Bangladesh's palimpsest past.

The concept of palimpsest dates back to the 17th century and refers to a type of paper, parchment, and vellum from which previous writings have been erased for further new writings. During the medieval period, it was a common practice to wash out a piece of paper due to insufficiency of writing material. During the 19th century, its definition reshaped into a manuscript on which later writing has been superimposed and the previous writing is erased. Palimpsest also denotes a location that contains diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface. Time, space and human beings all accumulate different layers of palimpsest. Geographers use this term to highlight the urban landscape that is written over by successive generations, but previous writings

are never erased. Similarly perceiving a city or a country as palimpsest foregrounds the fact that these localities are constantly evolving and expanding, adding more layers to the pre-existing history. This particular city or country reveals a brilliant interplay of the past and the present, stating the preservation of the past and its incorporation into the present.

Thomas De Quincey in *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain* relates human brain to palimpsest: “What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light” (171). De Quincey also highlights the major qualities of palimpsest, like the significance of the erased writing which also leaves an impact on the new superimposed material, similar to human brain where the memories of past experiences are always in contact with the present conditions and calls it, “our own heaven-created palimpsest, the deep memorial palimpsest of the brain” (21). Sarah Dillon in “Reinscribing De Quincey’s Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies” claims that Coleridge is generally associated with the inauguration of palimpsest as a literary metaphor, but it was De Quincey who initiated the concept of palimpsest which led to the endless process of “metaphorization of palimpsests from mid-nineteenth century (the most prolific period of palimpsest discoveries) to present day” (10).

According to George Orwell’s *1984* “All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as necessary” (78). This is what Anam does in her Bengal trilogy. Gaining her knowledge by exploring Bangladesh’s history through alternative means, in the form of accounts of ex freedom fighters and first hand witnesses of the 1971 war, she actually adds her own narrative about the separation of East Pakistan and its after effects to the books of history. She starts from the time when Pakistan was considered a country divided into two halves where

each part, known as East and West Pakistan, had different lifestyles and spoke different languages. Each part wanted economic, cultural, linguistic, and political supremacy over the other and considered language as the apple of discord. Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) is the story of a family who lives in the pre-partition time of East and West Pakistan. At the start of *A Golden Age*, Rehana is a young widow who has lost her husband due to heart attack and now is on the verge of losing her children to her brother-in-law because she has no means to support them. She tries her best to get them back and eventually she does. Her two children Maya and Sohail support the political movement of pro-Bangla stance. Anam weaves this family narrative around the significant issue of the separation of East Pakistan. While giving an interview to Lynn Heary on 11 January 2008, Anam says as follows: "I thought I would write a sort of epic, a very muscular narrative that had battle scenes and political rallies and all the sorts of big moments that you see in war novels. But actually, when I sat down to write, I ended up really thinking about what it was like for ordinary people to survive that war".

Anam's relatives were the first hand witnesses of 1971 conflict. Her mother Shaheen, works as a model for creating the character of Maya Sheherezade Haque. Her mother's older brother, who provided food and other facilities to his fellow young fighters, is a suggested model for Maya's older brother, Sohail. Anam says that she wanted to show to the world what happened to ordinary people when war unexpectedly interfered in their casual life.

The novel becomes a measure for Anam to add another layer of history to the official narrative. This is also done for the purpose of preserving the memories of the independence of Bangladesh. According to Jeffery A. Kroessler, in *The City as Palimpsest*, this preservation is necessary for the development of a country: "Preservation is essential for the health of the city, and the nation, for it preserves ideas, experience, and values no less than buildings and places.

Maintaining a dialogue between past and present is essential for a citizen's sense of identity" (2). Similarly, Alexander C. Diener states that people usually attach memories and identities to a particular place to make it more tangible and lasting. Anam in *The Good Muslim* (2011), pinpoints the fact that most of the places in Bangladesh were destroyed during the early years of its creation. The destroyed places were rebuilt in order to keep alive the memories and events associated with these places. One such place was Shaheed Minar, a symbol of Bengali Nationalism, it recalls the struggle of the martyrs of the language movement of 1952. Shaheed Minar is closely related to the language movement because it foregrounds the historical decision made by the Government of Pakistan about Urdu as an official language. The Bengali majority objected to that decision. The students of the University of Dhaka gathered at that place to protest; as the police opened fire to scatter the crowds, many were killed. The students of the university erected a monument at that place in the memory of those killed. This was demolished during Operation Searchlight and was rebuilt after Bangladesh got independence. In the novel, Anam writes: "Shaheed Minar was the first thing the Pakistan Army destroyed in the war. It was also the first thing to be rebuilt, taller and wider, but Maya wished they had left it broken, because now, shiny and freshly painted, it bore no sign of the struggle" (44). Amidst this language movement, there is Rehana Haque who lives in Dhaka, and while her children openly fight for independent Bangladesh, Haque cannot forget her love for Urdu, the language "she spoke with fluency, the Urdu of the enemy . . . she could not give up her love of Urdu, its lyrical lilt, its double meaning, its furrowed beat" (50). In the novel, when General Tikka Khan is appointed in East Pakistan and he starts to control different areas of Bengal, Rehana goes to the New Market and realizes that the place which is so close to her heart, where she used to shop for her children, bought her wedding sari, calculated the week's ration is now "an alien place, the air heavy with menace" (122). Sohail blames that this condition

of his country is due to the Urdu speaking Biharis who were rumored to be siding with the army, but Rehana's love for her Urdu speaking family once again erupts when her wounded sentiments do not allow her to remain silent and she scolds her son Sohail in the following words: "Why, I am Urdu speaking. So what?" (122). Hassan Askari Rizvi in *The Military and Politics in Pakistan* presents a similar scene, but from a different perspective. Rizvi claims that the Awami League workers abused and tortured many non-conformists after Mujib's Speech on 7 March 1971 and he further points out:

The Awami League workers were on rampage. There was widespread arson and looting in East Pakistan from the first week of March 1971. The Awami League workers attacked and killed non-conformist and members of Urdu-speaking community . . . they were forced to surrender their cars, ... those who refused were murdered in cold blood and their houses were burnt. (200)

Anam has tried to show how war creates conflicts within families where each person's heart beats for a different cause, where a mother is torn between her love for Bengal and her love for a country where she was born and raised and where all her family resides. Talking about these language related matters, Dr Junaid Ahmad, while speaking at an event organized by the Peace and Conflict Studies Department of NUML says, "Urdu was not the language of West part of Pakistan too. It was not the language of Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab or the present day Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa" (15). Bengali Language Implementation Act 1987 made Bengali language mandatory for all Bangladeshis. Many years before the application of this act, the Bengalis convinced each other to speak pure Bengali instead of Urdu to show their love for Bengal. Anam explores this historical act through Rehana who deals with an inner conflict when "[t]he Muslim

salutation Assalam Alaikum was replaced by the neutral Adab, or even Nomoshkar, the Hindu greeting. Rehana's tongue was too confused for these changes" (50).

Shaheed Minar is of utmost importance for all Bengalis due to its relation with the language movement. Anam insists upon protecting these monuments. On one occasion when Rehana persuades Maya to come out of the house and enjoy the monsoon season, Maya expresses her disappointment over the new setup of the country by saying, "I hate it... It's hideous" (*The Good Muslim* 101). Furthermore, she even feels disgusted when Rehana shows her the new parliament "[t]hat very nice American chap [Louis I. Khan] built it" and Maya replies, "Well, I don't like it" (102). The parliament, however, has been beautifully built on a pool of water "like a shapla flower in the river" (102). Maya does not like these newly built places because she has experienced the brutalities and atrocities of the 1971 conflict. The "killing of small children, the slow movement of clouds, the deaths of women, the sigh of fleeing birds, the rush of blood on the pavement" (58) has bred a certain hatred in her heart for the newly, brightly and beautifully built places, erasing every sign of history. She does not want to forget the sacrifices and hardships that her countrymen, women and places have faced during the time of war.

A palimpsest also insinuates a certain geological character. In the third edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, palimpsest is "a structure characterized by superimposing features produced at two or more distinct periods". Dhaka is a very significant metaphor in all the three books of the trilogy i.e. *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* and *The Bones of Grace*. Ahsan ul Kabir in "Planning and Development of Dhaka – A Story of 400 Years" states that before independence of Bangladesh, Dhaka served as a hub of trading, business center, a strong capital and a significant city of a nation with more than sixteen million inhabitants. It gained this worth after 1947, acting as a capital of East Pakistan and a major province of Pakistan. Kabir further states: "While

travelling through a political rollercoaster, the city received attention, negligence, political instability, poverty, natural calamity and went through different philosophical views for its development” (2). However, in its present condition Dhaka is frequently associated with overcrowding, mismanagement, political turmoil, ruler’s negligence and degradation. Similarly Kabir quotes M. A Mahmud that corruption and negligence of the leaders in severe climate change multiplied the problems of the city: “Much of the country is prone to annual flooding that delimits the spatial growth for a country with limited economic strength. Moreover, poor city management, lower efficiency in administration and management and large corruption in service provision are exacerbating the problems” (qtd. in Kabir 12).

In *A Golden Age* (2007), Anam presents Dhaka city as a form of escape for those who want to run away from the smell of “Burned thatch”, but Dhaka itself comprises narrow, dusty and flooded streets affording little inspiration to an artist like Joy, the younger brother of Sohail’s best friend Aref. Joy feels no attachment to Dhaka. However, after his release from jail he falls unexpectedly in love with it. This happens because of the time he spends with the twenty-three other inmates in the jail and the cruel treatment by the jailers. This turns Joy’s world into a never-ending nightmare. In the deeply humiliating atmosphere of the jail, Joy is forced to stop the bird singing in Bengali language. He tries to act according to the order and eventually ends up losing his finger, “That was the last day he was whole, later they took his finger as payment, so the birds would have one less place to perch, one less reason to sing” (193). When he is set free, the first thing he sees is the city of Dhaka. A city crowded with lots of villagers, narrow streets and hopelessness, Dhaka becomes a place which could be loved and admired by a person who has spent the prime of his youth in the darkness of a jail; a place to feel free, safe, and content. During the Independence movement, different areas of Dhaka such as Motijheel, Mirpur, Mohammadpur

and Dhanmodi turned into occupied areas. Independence enhanced the urbanization in Bangladesh (Kabir 19). In *A Golden Age*, Anam describes a scene of Dhaka from April 1971, under the title of “Radio free Bangladesh”. She describes Dhaka as a place gradually “adjusting to Occupied life” (71). It adjusted to the curfew life where soldiers placed their tanks, dug out the graves for dead bodies, had warehouse where they tortured the prisoners. Anam presents the condition of Dhaka during and after independence as the city that gradually lost its beauty due to the cruelty and violence it suffered during war.

In *The Bones of Grace* (2016), Anam compares Chittagong as a smaller version of Dhaka but with some attractions, “the city retained its old character as a hill station, a place where the air was cool and empty and lightened by its proximity to the sea” (131). Zubaida Haque, the adopted daughter of Maya, addresses Elijah Strong (her lover) in this text and tells him that Chittagong port (also known as Prosperity Shipbreaking) is perfect for any kind of punishment “because it was beautiful and ruined” (140). This shipyard consists of narrow rectangles of oceanfront where many ships rest in various states of decay. It is the place where half the novel takes place; this part of the novel also deals with the most significant issue of child labour. Zubaida finds herself with an unexpected job opportunity; she is assigned the task of assisting a group of foreigners in making a documentary about the labourers in the ship breaking industry. She and her foreigner friend, Gabriela, interview different labourers because they want to know about their daily lives. This ship breaking industry is a place of physical abuse where the labourers work as zombies without exercising any free will because: “there was an order on the lot, a hierarchy that had to be maintained and obeyed” (171). Anam exposes the brutalities these labourers face in their daily routine. Many lost their lives while beaching a ship with the pullers, thrown into graves with the others without having a proper funeral by their family members. One of the owners of the site is

Mirza Ali, who normalizes every mishap by saying “[s]hipbreaking is important for Bangladesh. We need steel. Lot of construction everywhere” (149). He arranges meetings of these workers with Gabriela and Zubaida in his office who all end up counting their blessings for being there and praising everything on the site: “how kind the owners were, that they were always paid on time, and it was the best job they could hope for” (160). According to The National Child Labour Survey conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of statistics in 2003 “[a]bout 73 million working children are less than 10 years old and the total number of economically active child population 5 to 17 years of age was estimated at 352 million in 2002”. Most of the children worked at ship breaking yard as cutter helpers and sweepers. Giving an interview to the executive director of NGO ship breaking platform Patrizia Heidegger, a 16-year-old child worker said that he was horrified by the sight of those workers who were at the verge of being hit by steel plates and all this usually happened without warning. Mohammad Ali Shahin, the platform coordinator, was of the view that poverty was the sole reason behind ship breaking yards. In the novel, the starting point for this is the death of the head of the family and when survival becomes a threat, the family has to send the child to the yards to earn as much as he can. Whereas Zubaida and Gabriela want to expose this torture meted out to those innocent children, the workers think that the film is not going to change anything because they are there to feed their families and this was their last option. Children are not employed on their own; some contractors do this job and bring them to yards, such as Russel and Mo who are brought by a contractor in the novel after the death of their older brother. Anam depicts the inner life of these workers through Zubaida and Gabriela’s research for a documentary.

Sigmund Freud’s concept of ‘the mystic writing pad’ is closely related to palimpsest. In ‘A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad’ (1952), Freud presents the idea of a “perceptual apparatus of mind”, where it is compared to the children’s toy of writing pad that consists of a celluloid sheet

and a waxing paper. When one writes on it, the writing material remains on the celluloid sheet which can be erased by lifting the sheet, leaving an imprint on the bottom layer of the pad. This writing pad resembles the human psyche in the manner in which it records material. Just like the pad, it can have an infinite number of recordings while always remaining receptive to new material. But like the writing pad it does not become absolutely new, the previous material or recordings do leave traces and become faint. Freud believes that this is how human psyche works, always receiving impressions from the outside world and layering them in the unconscious. Jacques Derrida while analyzing this writing pad analogy claims that no one can understand the world directly, our sense of ourselves always depends on our previous memory. “Writing,” says Derrida, “supplements perception, before perception even appears to itself” (224). Freud writes: I do not think it is too far-fetched too to compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system Pcpt.-Cs (Perceptual Conscious) and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception (211).

The mystic writing pad is a significant model for writing. In order to understand the current situation one must trace back previous experiences. Similarly Anam in *A Golden Age* (2007) traces her country’s history, her close relatives’ experiences during the time of chaos in 1971, her own observations while living in contemporary Bangladesh and the effects of that brutal period on the psyche of young generation. Anam writes, what Kroessler states, “a willful overwriting of the past to fulfill the immediate needs of the present” (3). By examining all the layers that came before us, one can truly understand the real nature of a country. To understand a country or a city, De Certeau claims, one must acknowledge how all these complexities “intertwine and create an urban fabric” (117). A famous architectural historian Anthony Robins states his point that he sees the city in

layers: “Times Square exists in its present form, and simultaneously in its dangerous and decayed state of the 1970s, its midcentury heyday, and even in the unbuilt skyscrapers designed by Philip Johnson in the 1980s. We are at a loss when such complexity is erased” (qtd. in Kroessler 4).

Another historian, Marvin Bram, claims that when one erases the past, layer by layer, this process is similar to demolishing depth with the surface. The palimpsest foregrounds the dialogue between the old and the new in order to understand contemporary culture. *A Golden Age* (2007), starts when Rehana loses her children in March 1959 to her brother-in-law due to the unpredictable and hazardous situation in East Pakistan which was about to separate from West Pakistan after the elections. In this whole novel, the Pro-Bangla stance gradually increases and eventually envelops every person in the country, ending in the fall of Dhaka in 1971. Rehana lives in her old huge bungalow at Road 5 in Dhaka, even after her husband’s death. All the memories of her husband live with her when she loses him and her children as well before the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. But she has to do something to make a secure living and she, as suggested by Mrs Chowdry turns the big plot comprising her garden into another house for a rent out to save her children, “Rehana looked at the house with pride and ache. It was there to remind her of what she had lost, and what she had won. And how much the victory had cost. That is why she had named it Shona, gold” (16).

The reminiscence of Rehana’s old house, haunts her every time she looks at the “Two gates, two driveways, two houses” (16). Every year she holds a party to memorize the day she had returned to Dhaka with her children. It was the same year when Sheikh Mujibur Rehman won the election. At a family gathering Rehana’s son, Sohail, talks about the delay in convening of the national assembly and demands drastic actions like “[h]e should declare independence” (29). Rizvi remarks that the “[p]ostponement of the National Assembly session forced East Pakistan to a point

of no return” (199). Sohail represents the guerrilla fighters of the time who are shown yearning for immediate action by Sheikh Mujib as they cannot bear West Pakistan’s supremacy over anything. Dr Moonis Ahmer calls the postponement of the session of the national assembly as one of the major causes for the loss of the Eastern Wing of Pakistan. The younger generation at the time had developed resentment and hatred for West Pakistan. This is clearly depicted when Sohail lashes out: “West Pakistan is bleeding us. We earn most of the foreign exchange. We grow rice, we make the jute, and we got nothing- no schools, no hospitals, no army. We can’t even speak our own bloody language” (*A Golden Age* 30).

Sohail, Joy and their friends join students from the Dhaka University in their protests. Sohail with his friend heads towards the Bengali regiments to evaluate the situation. When Sohail returns, he asks Rehana to help him to store ammunition in their house for the future guerrilla operation that would be placed in Dhaka as the struggle for independence is in full swing. She asks, “You want to use Shona” (104). Once again, she starts imagining the history associated with her house “Shona with her back to the sun. Shona that had given her children. Proud, vacant Shona of many dreams” (104). Rehana and her friends sew clothes for the refugees when the cyclone hits Bengal in 1970. Sohail provides medical facilities to them. Maya leaves for Calcutta to write press releases and work in the nearby refugee camps.

Anam portrays Sohail as a true nationalist in *A Golden Age* (2007). As Zubaida says in *The Bones of Grace* (2016): “Nationalism was the religion in our household” (35). Her statement shows his extreme, intense and unconditional love for his beloved country. Hans Kohn explains cultural nationalism and highlights that nationalists retain the value of their mother tongue, elevate it, and thus prepare the basis for the “national statehood soon to be raised by the people in whom they had kindled the spirit” (45). While explaining Bengali nationalism M. G Kabir in *Religion*,

Language And Nationalism In Bangladesh states as follows: “The Pakistan movement in 1940’s, the emergence of Bangladesh in less than a quarter century of the achievement of Pakistan and finally the search for new identity in post-1971 Bangladesh-all these facts point at the volatility of nationalism in Bangladesh” (5).

Kabir further explains that religion was replaced by language at the time when Bengalis were struggling for an independent Bangladesh. The achievement of Bangladesh further aggravates Bengali nationalism. Similarly Zilur R. Khan in *Islam and Bengali Nationalism* claims that the rise of Bengali nationalism is due to the intra-national and international conflicts. One cannot forget the growing rift between the “Pakistani Muslims and Bengali Muslims, between Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims and between Indians and Bangladeshis” (Khan 834). In *Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh: An Introductory Outline*, A.F Salahuddin Ahmad points out another harsh reality when he says that the combination of East and West Pakistan was a “bizarre look to an already politically unstable scenario” (11). The writer also claims that there was nothing common between these two wings of Pakistan other than religion; they were poles apart when it came to language, lifestyle, culture, and political values. These conflicts, many times, resulted in tragedies. The 1970 election results, the delay of the national assembly session, Operation Searchlight and finally General Tikka Khan’s attempt to exert control over East Pakistan fuelled the fire rising in the hearts of Bengalis. Anam labels General Tikka Khan, “The Butcher of Bengal” (97) in *A Golden Age* (2007). General Yahya Khan appointed Tikka Khan as the Chief Martial Law Administrator of Bangladesh to control the uprising while the negotiations were going on between Yahya and Sheikh Mujib. After the failure of their meeting Yahya Khan ordered Tikka Khan for a crackdown on the Awami League and its supporters. Anam recalls that throughout June, Tikka Khan’s soldiers made their way across summer plains of

Bangladesh. They looted everything, homes, women and even their will to survive on earth. She further states, “They were explorers, pioneers of cruelty, everyday outdoing their own brutality” (133). “Why did you initiate the genocide in Dhaka?” a journalist asked Tikka Khan in 1997 and he casually replied that there was no genocide. Furthermore, he said that few terrorists were making plans at Jagannath Hall to attack the army appointed there to calm down the situation. Hassan Askari Rizvi points out that the military action in East Pakistan turned violent when there was no point of return for any group. It eventually lead to the dismemberment of Pakistan, which was also the combined result of “several domestic and external factor . . . Basically, it represented the failure of Yahya Khan, Bhutto and Mujibur Rehman” (207).

In the massacre of the Bengali people led by General Tikka Khan, during their struggle for freedom in Bangladesh, Aref, Joy’s older brother, and Silvi’s first husband, Sabeer, dies, which turns out to be the vital point in Silvi’s life, as she starts following Islam: “I am in pordah. I don’t appear before strangers” (168). These incidents in Bangladesh deeply affected each individual at that time, even those who chose to remain inactive during the struggle for freedom. Silvi’s condition is totally a surprise and at the same time, a shock for Rehana and Maya (who consider themselves as not so religious); Maya thinks, “what religion had possessed her? Certainly not the familiar kind” (168) which they are practicing. Silvi presents the point of view of the religious parties of her time when she says that Pakistan should stay together “[t]hat’s why it was conceived. To keep the ummah united. To separate a wing is a sin against your religion” (260). When Sabeer gets married to Silvi, he is in the Pakistan army, but during the riots, he rebels against it because he considers the independence of his country more important than his loyalty to the army, supposedly working against it. Pakistan army soldiers capture him and put him into jail but he is released due to Rehana’s efforts as she pleads to her brother-in-law (who is serving at a high post

for the government of West Pakistan) to convince the concerned army heads. Sabeer faces extreme physical abuse during his imprisonment. Rehana accidentally holds his hand to push him into the rickshaw and he immediately screams because his “nails were soft and pulpy. Closer. Not nails, just red tipped fingers. There were no nails. No nails; only red tipped fingers” (209). Through these mini narratives, Anam recalls the individual experiences of those who lived at the time of the 1971 conflict. Sabeer represents the particular group of soldiers who turned into Mukti Bahinis (Freedom fighters), and eventually turned into staunch nationalists during the creation of Bangladesh. Alison S. Fell and Nina Wardleworth in *The Colour of War Memory: Cultural Representations of Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, analyse the role of Tirailleurs Senegalese during the first and Second World War. They also point out that these war representations (produced by authors) can be considered as “examples of what Max Silverman has defined as ‘palimpsestic memory’, containing traces of the present and the past” (76). Anam actually traces the present by delving into history. Her representation of war and its atrocities is basically a way to remember the struggle behind the creation of Bangladesh.

While recalling the past, Anam expresses her disappointment about the treatment meted out to Bengalis by Pakistani authorities. She says that they think about East Pakistan as a colony. First, they tried to force everyone to speak Urdu instead of Bengali. They took the jute money from Bengal and spent it on factories in Karachi and Islamabad. According to a report, East Pakistan made 70% of the Pakistan’s export while it only received 25% of the money. East Pakistan had eleven textile mills whereas West Pakistan had nine in 1948. Subhrendu Shekhar Bhattacharjee in the “Growth of Nationalism and Independence of Bangladesh” highlights his views regarding the injustice meted out against East Pakistan, as its export earning was being used to develop the big cities of West Pakistan such as Karachi. Eastern Pakistanis demanded economic, cultural and

regional autonomy. These economic disparities in terms of allocation of funds and the state's discriminatory attitude towards Bengalis, along with language movement planted the seeds of discontent in their hearts against West Pakistan. Anam's artistic manifestation of the 1971 crisis in her various novels amounts to a return to these memories of discrimination and injustice, which she thought, Bengalis faced. This highlights the important role played by the politics of remembrance and representation in refashioning a nation'.

The victory of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman in 1970 was immediately dismissed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, and General Yahya Khan, despite the fact that Mujib won the election with a majority. Professor Muzaffar Ahmad, a famous Awami leaguer remarks that the election results showed that Bangladesh was not a colony anymore and Bengalis would never bow to any person or nation. However, Hassan Askari Rizvi in *The Military and Politics in Pakistan* points out that before the election period, few Awami League supporters chanted for independence, but "Sheikh Mujibur Rehman did not yield to their demands. In the post-election period there was a pressure to turn the election into a vote of independence" (199). Sohail expresses his resentment over this in *A Golden Age* (2007) as he remarks that his fellow students are getting nervous because "they are worried the election won't be honored" (31). The enthusiasm of students of the University of Dhaka and other institutions created a massive pressure on Mujibur Rehman.

Anam recollects another event which is extremely important in the history of Bangladesh. She beautifully describes the whole scene of Mujibur Rehman's speech on 7 March 1971. Her remarkable skills are evident in her portrayal of Bengalis who attended the mass rally. Their sentiments are described in the following way: "His. They belonged to him now; they were his charge, his children. They called him father. They loved him the way orphans dream of their lost

parents: without promise, only hope” (*The Good Muslim* 51). While evaluating the speech A. Arefin Siddique calls it as “The Greatest Speech of the Greatest Bangali” with “A message about the emergence of a new state on the global map and a notification cum narrative on the winding up of the eastern region of the then Pakistani state as a natural progression” (1). Subhrendu Shekhar Bhattacharjee remarks that this particular speech was an epoch in itself and the leader didn’t disappoint his long waiting audience. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali said in the press release that the entire world will now realize the significance of their leader. He was the “Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and our glorious Liberation War” (Bhattacharjee). Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad states that this is the time when on the other side of the world Biafran war was going on: “Biafra wanted to secede, the Nigerians cracked down really hard on them, and the international community agreed that the response was justified” (4). Ahmad further points out that the international community did not think that Bangladesh was seceding while considering the speech of Sheikh Mujib on 7th March 1970. Hassan Zaheer in *The Separation of East Pakistan: The Rise and Realization of Bengali Muslim Nationalism* states that at the end of October 1971 “the Mukti Bahini, armed and trained in large numbers during the last six months in India, had intensified its operation inside East Pakistan and on its border” (321). Zaheer further states that under such circumstances it was impossible for Pakistan army to defend East Pakistan territory because the public support was already with these Mukti Bahinis. Similarly Rizvi highlights two factors which went against the success of Pakistan Army in 1971; firstly, the Pakistan Army was at a loss due to the absence of public support, secondly India played a key role in fuelling the fire against the Pakistan army by providing arms and training to the Bengali freedom fighters: “Once the civil strike broke out, the Indian Government made no secret of her deep sympathies and support for the Bangladesh/insurgent movement” (203). In *A Golden Age* (2007),

Maya also says that Pakistan army knows that “India is going to come down on our side. And then it’ll be over” (265). But Indian Government further provoked the situation by presenting a negative image of Pakistan as an instigator of “massacre of defenseless people” (Rizvi 203). However, Pakistani historians hold Mujibur Rehman, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Yahya Khan responsible for these deadly circumstances.

Rehana, at the end of *A Golden Age*, expresses her joy about the end of war by addressing her husband and says, “we have to try to find ways to exist in a country without war” (286). She says that Niazi will sign the treaty and “I will walk in the streets” (286). Here she is referring to the Eastern Commander of Pakistan A. A. Khan Niazi, when he signed the treaty on 16 Dec 1971 at the Ramna Racecourse garden in Dhaka. The treaty known as “The Instrument of Surrender” signed by General Niazi, led to the creation of People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Rehana is overwhelmed at the end of *A Golden Age* where she expresses her happiness, “the roads are flat and dusty; we are spellbound, love-bound, home bound, singing How I love you my golden Bengal” (286).

On the basis of the argument furnished above, one can conclude that Anam reuses past events to revitalize the 1971 conflict and the after effects of this conflict for her readers. She remaps particular places (Shaheed Minar, Louis Khan’s Parliament, Dhaka, Chittagong and its port, and many residential houses) in her trilogy. Anam’s remapping of these places shows how the war not only damaged the physical infrastructure existing outside but also the internal pattern of human minds, filling them with uncertainty, disturbance and confusion. Rehana, Maya, Sohail, Joy and other characters, represent the people of that time who suffered in different ways. Active participants like Maya, Sohail and Joy experience physical as well as psychological traumas after the conflict, while on the other hand Rehana and other minor female characters endure intense

hardships due to their fractured relationships. Anam's representation of such instances not only highlights the disintegration of Bangladesh, but also its devastating result which lead to the disintegration of families. Rehana does not only lose her son, Sohail, but also a beloved and caring brother for Maya too. I have analyzed the character's association with places and important events of Bangladesh under the light of palimpsestic approach where everything has multiple interpretations. Anam explores distinctive approaches of her characters to present a realistic portrayal of the 1971 conflict. Through the textual analysis of major events, Anam lays out a new pattern of the historical events related to her country to enable her readers to reinvestigate the 1971 conflict.

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Canada's Contaminated Water: Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* as an Environmental Dystopian Novel

Muhammad Ali

Abstract

This paper highlights water-related concerns in Margaret Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*. When placed in the framework of Oceanic Studies, which deals with the role of water in literary texts, *Surfacing* emerges as a novel concerned with water not only because throughout the story, water assumes the form of a symbol or metaphor and adds to the literary value of the novel, but also because it is presented as an element of life that is important to such an extent that water wars are being waged between countries to attain maximum autonomy over this resource. Ironically enough, this element, essential for sustaining human life, has always been treated carelessly by the humans themselves. The paper conducts a close textual study of the instances in the novel in which this careless attitude comes to the fore and analyses these events in the light of Charne Lavery's views regarding the various forms of rubbish entering the water and the naming of these forms. Employing Lavery's article "Drift" as its main theoretical text, the paper associates the kinds of water-filth presented in the novel with her proposed terms. It draws extensively from the latest research reports on Canadian water, tracing its current condition to the human attitudes represented by Atwood around four decades ago. The analysis of these reports establishes *Surfacing* as a piece of literature that is realistic and at the same time, concerned about the environment. It, thereby, emerges as an environmental dystopian novel that portends a grim future for Canadian waters.

Keywords: Oceanic Studies, water pollution, Canadian water

This research puts forth the argument that in Margaret Atwood's 1972 novel *Surfacing*, water not only emerges as an actant that helps in the formulation of scenes pertaining to sailing, fishing and swimming and subsequently aids in setting the story in the wilderness, but also makes itself visible as a pitiable element of life subjected to the cruelty of human beings. I also contend that Atwood not only highlights callous human behaviour towards water, but by doing so, emerges as the author of a dystopian literary work which when studied in the light of updated reports on Canadian water, reflects genuine environmental concerns on the writer's part from over four decades ago. The moments in the novel referring to the contamination of water being carried out

by various characters, including the protagonist herself, render *Surfacing* as a piece of literature that is relevant to the modern times in terms of its environmental concerns. These are manifest to such an extent that even the literati, generally associated with abstract knowledge, seem inclined to acquaint themselves with concrete elements physically impacting the world.

While one of the results in this regard has been ecocriticism, water's ample and unavoidable presence has also resulted in the emergence of Oceanic Studies, the theoretical framework that shifts the literary scholars' focus from "green" (plants) to "blue" (water) and establishes water's importance as an entity complete in itself, not merely co-existing with other natural elements. This marine inflected mode of thinking avoids looking at water as simply a metaphor and takes it as a life-giving element demanding careful treatment instead. When placed in this context, *Surfacing* emerges as a work that informs the readers not only about the water related concerns that existed back in the 1970s in Canada, but also about their outcomes stretching themselves to the twenty first century.

In the research previously carried out on the novel, water either has been taken as a symbol, or nature has collectively been paid attention to with the application of Ecocritical theory. In her paper titled "Exploitation of Women and Nature in *Surfacing*", Fatma Kalpakli considers the novel from an Ecofeminist perspective and asserts that while men partake in destroying nature, as the protagonist's brother used to do by keeping insects in bottles, the women are the saviours of nature. This is evident from the fact that the protagonist releases the insects and animals captured by her brother back into their natural habitats such as the lake. The protagonist's close connection with nature has also been taken as a proof of women's sensitivity towards nature by the writer. Fikret Güven's paper, through its title, "Ecological Concerns in *Surfacing*", apparently promises a discussion focused on the maltreatment in the novel. However, when scrutinized by the reader, the

research combines both feminist and ecological concerns and holds patriarchy responsible for thrusting artificial grooming on both nature and women as a means of achieving personal gratification. As a result, the natural environment in which the protagonist of *Surfacing* strives to get to know herself reveals to her a “world that oppresses and dominates both women and nature” (1865). Monica Bottez, in her paper titled “The Symbolism of Rebirth in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*”, takes water as an epiphanic symbol, for according to her, it is in the depths of water that the protagonist comes in contact with the “deepest layers of her (unconscious) self” (19). So, in the two papers discussed first, nature’s destruction is attended to, but the destruction of aquatic life is not singled out. In the second paper, water’s importance has been established but as a literary device, in the form of a symbol. The research gap which this paper thus intends to fill is the one left owing to an indifferent attitude towards water’s contamination in *Surfacing* and also towards the destruction which such human attitudes induce. Also, it does so by applying a theory that is focussed solely on water and on the burgeoning realization of its importance to both scientific and literary scholars.

One of the reasons why Oceanic Studies are now deemed as necessary is the acidification of the ocean. Charne Lavery, a researcher from this field, talks about this acidification in detail in her article titled “Drift”, and presents three kinds of cases of contamination. Two of these cases, referred to as “Drift Across” and “Drift In”, act as the major key terms employed in this paper, and it is under these headings that the kinds of pollutants mentioned in *Surfacing* as harmful for water have been placed. The paper then moves from instances of water-contamination in the novel towards the authenticity of water clashes presented between America and Canada by the author, and arrives at a conclusion with the help of updated reports on Canadian water that reveal how water contamination has resulted in the desire for both more and clean water.

The importance of lake is established in the very initial chapters of the novel *Surfacing*. It is something that continues to attract the unnamed protagonist, who time and again searches for a way to walk towards the lake. This attraction becomes comprehensible by the time the story reaches its interval, for it is the lake which shows the protagonist all that she has been searching for, be it her father or her own identity. It is through the role of the lake that the title of the novel is also perceived easily, for the protagonist, after having dived into the water, surfaces as someone different and someone aware of the things to which she was hitherto been oblivious. Considering the fact that it is water that helps the protagonist know herself better, one can argue that water emerges as a benefactor or as an element that is equal to humans. Atwood also sheds light on the manner in which humans treat water at various points in the story.

The first such instance is when David says that “this country is founded on the bodies of dead animals” and the animals which he then refers to are “fish”, “seals” and “beavers” (Atwood 46). Focussing on the names of these animals makes the reader realize that all of the creatures mentioned by David are marine creatures. The unfortunate fact is that human development has been achieved at the cost of the loss and degradation of marine biodiversity. It is interesting to note how before the author moves on to describe major human activities pertaining to water pollution, she takes Canada’s very existence as the starting point of human cruelty towards nature, specifically the water kingdom. While this forebodes a certain maltreatment towards water that will recur in the novel, it also provides the reader authentic information regarding Canada’s geology. According to a recent report “no country in the world has as much of its surface area covered by freshwater as does Canada” (“Water”).

The second mention of water, specifically unclean water is also made by David while the characters of the novel are focussing on why the Americans are so interested in the Canadian wild

area of which the lake is also an essential part. In this discussion, David talks about how Americans are “running out of water” and are actually “dirtying up all of theirs” (Atwood 123). This is then taken as the main cause of the rising American interest in Canada, which in the same dialogues, is again referred to as a country which “is almost water if you look at a map” (123). The irony presented in these dialogues is how water is essential yet neglected. While it is so important that invasion of another country is being planned in order to get it one way or the other, there, at the same time, it is being made dirty by the people themselves. It is also interesting to note how, ironically, it is after making their own water bodies filthy and unworthy of usage that the Americans are now turning their focus towards Canada’s water. This shows how it is only after mistreating nature that humans realize the importance of its role in their lives. This fact is pointed out by multiple literary environmental scholars who argue that water is prone to such maltreatment because of its vastness and its late response to its pollution, for water does not respond immediately to the garbage thrown inside it, but after a few years when the detritus has gradually but completely dissolved.

A very important instance, and one which starts bringing us even closer to Lavery’s ideas is when the protagonist, along-with Anna, David and Joe sails towards another end of the lake and what she comes across is “trash”, “orange peelings”, “tin cans and a rancid bulge of greasy paper” (140). Looking at all this filth, the protagonist expresses her dissatisfaction in the following words: “It was like dogs pissing on a fence, as if the endlessness, anonymous water and unclaimed land, compelled them to leave their signature, stake their territory, and garbage was the only thing they had to do with it” (140). What the protagonist refers to as “anonymous” in order to find out a justification for this action of the humans, is what Charne Lavery names as “ideal location” in the introduction to her article, “Drift”. These terms, one used by Atwood and one used by Lavery, are

seemingly different in every sense but what connects them together with respect to water related concerns is that owing to water's misfortune of not being able to talk or because of its vastness spread throughout the world rendering it as something that cannot be owned by anyone makes it that "ideal location" for throwing things into it. Its anonymity diminishes the risk of any attack from its side and its hugeness is what makes it easy for humans to throw things into it, for eventually, those things will be "secretly sunk" as Lavery puts it.

The things mentioned in the paragraph above are material things, the kind of which are mentioned by Lavery in the section "Drift Across" of her article, in which she tells that "debris", abandoned "equipment", "pieces of marine trash", collectively referred to as "debris" by her are also found in water, making it highly contaminated. Along-with the cans and peelings, what the protagonist of Atwood's novel recalls is the "ripped" (166) doll which was flung in the lake by her in her childhood; this also forms part of the detritus which is damaging the waters. Apparently, the protagonist's sudden recalling of her own self-induced water pollution may make the reader think that it is the beginning of the realization on her part of the damage which detritus can cause to water. However, when the protagonist again adds to the lake's pollution a few more chapters into the novel, it makes us link the doll incident to her later activities in the sense that if it is not from a young age that humans are told how important clean water is, the realization may not come at a later age as well.

Furthermore, when Charne Lavery describes the dead human bodies lying in the oceans as the "horrible fact" related to water contamination, we at once are stimulated to attend to the horrible fact of our story as well, that of the narrator's drowned father. When the author says that "some of the human detritus in the oceans are the humans themselves, many lives lost" (Lavery), we are directed towards the scene when while swimming in the lake, the protagonist sees "dark

oval trailing limbs” with “eyes” that “were open” (182). The fact that she does not realize at the moment is that her father’s dead body is not the subject of focus here, but the dead body lying in water and adding to its pollution. It is his “camera” as well which is mentioned later on in an attempt to comprehend how he might have been drowned: “he must’ve drifted; he had a camera around his neck, big one . . .” are the words uttered by David (201).

When the novel is about to end, the protagonist initially expressing sadness at water being filled with garbage adds to the garbage herself when in her fury, she takes out the film from her friends’ camera and throws it into the lake, which then “coils onto the sand under the water” and the reels of which then swim “away into the lake like tadpoles . . .” (215). The concern regarding acidification of the ocean seems right at this point, when the readers observe that camera films, made out of certain chemicals are also being thrown into the water.

However, it is not only the careless attitude of humans or their lack of knowledge regarding what garbage can do to water in the future that has been pointed by Atwood in *Surfacing*. The author also points out how illogical beliefs or mythologies of people, apparently dealt with veneration, also play a significant part in the kind of pollution being discussed, somehow making it impossible for humans to avoid making water polluted. In the final chapters of the novel, we are introduced to the gods of water by the protagonist who then also informs the reader regarding the belief that offerings in the form of clothes are to be made to these gods. The protagonist, after making her partners go away and in her days spent alone in the wilderness, carries out this offering. During one of her swims in the lake, she takes off her clothes and throws them in the water, which then “sway” like “sleeves bladders of air” (230). Thus, clothes along-with grease, fruit coverings, tin cans and human bodies play a vital part in forming the collective garbage that “drift(s) across” water bodies according to Charne Lavery, and makes it impure.

Lavery's idea of "Drift In" is equally relevant to a reading of the novel's water related themes. By "Drift In", the scholar means the drifting in of the heat into the water. Taking the Pacific Ocean as the main example, Lavery tells that "a large amount of atmospheric heat is being taken up by the Pacific Ocean." When the readers are told that this heat is then transferred to the Indian Ocean, threatening a rise in the global atmospheric temperature, *Surfacing* once again comes to the mind, specifically its scenes in which the readers are told how the trees around the lake are not being taken care of. Either they are dying due to a certain disease, or they are being cut down by the surveyors who are planning to build a reservoir near the lake. In an article titled "Trees Play Key Role in Purifying our Water", the writer, John Rosenow tells that trees act as "natural filters to protect our streams, rivers and lakes", for they prevent soil from making its way quickly into the water and also slow down the falling of raindrops, giving time to the water to "soak into the soil". Considering all these scientific facts, if *Surfacing* is brought under consideration, then one scene turns out to be most relevant with regard to the concern for the trees which are major sources of water purification. It is when the protagonist looks at the surveyors and says, "[T]hey were going to raise the lake level as they had sixty years ago, they were plotting the new shoreline. Twenty feet up again and this time they wouldn't cut off the trees as they had before, it would cost too much, they would be left to rot" (Atwood 144). The painful idea behind this activity is then presented by the protagonist herself later on, when she says, "The lake didn't matter to them, only the system" (145). This scene from *Surfacing* is a fine representation of Lavery's idea of "Drift In", for if the trees are left to rot and the only concern that remains is of installing advanced technologies, it comes up as another cruelty of human beings. Apart from being a cruelty, the negligence towards trees while focussing on collecting water seems an idiocy as well, for as mentioned above, the trees act as important sources to clean the water present in the

lakes and rivers. At this point, the novel also seems to show how it is important for humans to have a thorough knowledge of their planet's geological details in order to have an idea about how to live a healthy lifestyle. It is not hard to comprehend how the maltreatment of trees will result in the maltreatment of water, and the maltreatment of water will in turn affect human life in multiple ways, for the water will not only be unclean without trees planted along lakes, but will also gradually dry up and become unavailable for use any way.

Surfacing also emerges as a novel that provides authentic information regarding the situation of water during the times when this novel was published. The clash between Canadians and Americans is quite evident in the novel and time and again, the readers come across American characters sailing through the lake, trying to take over the area and endeavouring to make water reservoirs to take and store water, as is pointed by David. In an article titled "Canada Has Water, the U.S. Wants It", Marc Montgomery states that back in the 1950s, the U.S. made "plans to use nuclear explosions to blast canals from Canada's north, down to the U.S. border." Keeping this historical information in mind, when one reverts to the lines of David in which he is talking about the Americans as "Yanks" who "will be building" "water pipelines" in order to "get the water down there" (Atwood 123), one wonders at the historically truthful side of the novel presenting Margaret Atwood as someone writing a story not only on a search for identity, but on a search for more and more clean water as well, a resource which had actually started to become scarce in those times. The activities of the Americans, those of making their own water filthy, causing their own people to run out of it can be also seen in the light of Marc Montgomery's 2015 article cited above which also talks about the droughts taking place in America. As a result, *Surfacing* also becomes a futuristic novel which back in the 1970s, depicted what would happen to people who are not taking care of their water. Similarly, all the detritus discussed in this paper in the process of

applying Lavery's "Drift Across" idea to the novel can also be analysed in the light of modern reports on water pollution in Canada. In an article written by Catherine Paquette entitled "Water Pollution in Canada and What You Need to Know", the writer, who happens to be an Associate Specialist at Freshwater Health Assessments, describes pollution as "one of the most significant threats to aquatic ecosystems in Canada". The current situation of water pollution in Canada can thus be traced back to the attitudes of people towards water which Margaret Atwood described in the year 1972.

To conclude, if looked at from an environmental perspective, *Surfacing* emerges not just as a novel that treats water as a metaphor or as an element taking the readers into philosophical depths, but as a work of fiction having scientific value in that it is concerned about what is taking place in the environment, and predicts what will happen if these environmental issues are not attended properly and seriously. The ideas discussed in the novel can be validated using the latest scientific researches and reports. Novels such as *Surfacing* do not only provide readers with aesthetic pleasure, but also inculcate in them the importance of following sound environmental practices to ensure human survival on earth. Moreover, even if one asserts that water is to be taken only as a symbol for self-actualization in *Surfacing*, something which most of the scholars have done, what must be taken into consideration is that until the author points out all kinds of filth that have polluted the lake, she does not move towards the protagonist's self-actualization. It is when each and every pollutant contaminating the lake is brought to *surface* that the protagonist reaches the state of self-actualization. Hence, what water demands, even when it is to be treated philosophically, is cleanliness, which is only possible if a respectable status is given to it, that of an entity that is essential for human survival in both its physical and metaphysical states.

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Short Story

Fading Reflections

Rabia Ramzan

Terrified. I hurried down the stairs. I was running like mad. Yet, mad I was not. I fell down. I stood up. I was running again. The tears were streaming down like rivulets from my eyes. The fear was tearing me away. What was I thinking? I'm not sure. To me, it was all like a surreal dream sequence at the beginning of a horror film. And, very surely, dreaming I was not.

A young man.

A blonde woman.

Stairs.

The intensity of emotions, ecstasy, exhilaration, and euphoria.

He was cutting his wrist.

He was holding his bloody arm out to her.

He took a step forward and he was cutting his wrist again.

A deep cut.

A pool of blood.

He was losing consciousness.

He fell down dead.

The clenched hands of the woman.

The echo of footsteps.

A series of muddled events.

.....

He fell down. She raised her head. She looked at him. She looked around. She turned. She hurried away.

He caught the glimpse of the fading form of the blonde woman.

His dead body lay slumped over a large pool of blood on the stairs.

She walked downstairs. Her steps were firm. She knew the way. Yet, she stumbled. Her eyes showed traces of tears. Yet, her lips were strangely curved in a smile. There came a sound of running feet from the corridor below.

.....

I am not making up a story in case someone asks what I was doing up there, but I, perhaps, am. No, I'm not. It was all real. Concrete. I witnessed it.

My steps crackled through the concrete pavements and the silence seemed to amplify the sound, horrifying me even more. I hovered down the corridor. I scurried past the offices and locked rooms.

.....

I heard a faint noise coming from a direction that led me not far from the stairs. With my bag slung on my shoulder, I stepped in one of the rooms. I saw the whole thing from the beginning.

.....

I was out of breath. My feet refused to move further. But then, I geared myself up, tightened my fists, coaxed my tired legs, and started running through the hallway. I just wanted to flee. I leapt out of the big overhead door. Panicked, I came upon a fence. I tried to push it down and to climb over it. I couldn't. I tripped and fell over a large stone. I heard the crowd screaming. My own voice seemed to cut through the noise they made. I breathed heavily. My heart raced. My eyes failed. The life in me started to drain. I sank into oblivion.

.....

For a moment, everything became very still, and everywhere was silence, a strange stillness, a strange silence. I grasped at the sight. I waited. Nothing happened.

I put my ear against the wall. The undertones resolved themselves into screaming and harsh whispering. They were screaming at the top of their lungs.

His face became more serene and calm. "You don't know how I feel. You don't understand." The blonde woman did not answer. I could see from her face that she was having trouble believing him. She began to doubt his sanity. "I wasn't flirting". The voice was more demanding. She did not answer. Perhaps, she thought he might go away if she did not answer. He tried to speak again. He paused. He waited. She did not answer. She did not move.

He took out from his pocket a razor blade, grasped it, and slashed open his own wrist with it. There was no reaction. He held his bloody arm out to her. There was no reaction. He took a step forward and, in an instance, down came another cut. There was no reaction. With the blood all over his arm, he took another step forward and set about cutting off his wrist with that razor blade. There was no reaction.

.....

His eyes showed that he was deeply hurt. She looked at him with serious eyes. She raised her head. She opened her lips as if she would speak. She did not. She shook her head. She didn't seem to mind.

.....

I shuddered. I grasped the nearby chair. The fury of what I was looking at instantly possessed me. Terror rooted my feet to the floor and I froze in my place. My fear and the horror were extreme. I wiped the beads of perspiration from my forehead and tried to control my racing heart. My senses were fully alive now, my eyes seemingly seeing everything, my ears picking up the slightest

sounds. I stood ready to make a run. I gritted my teeth, mustered all my strength, and hurriedly ran away.

.....

Since then, I have not been able to rid myself of the phantasm of the young man and the blonde woman. No. I was wrong. The scenes are fading away. I'm forgetting. I already have. No, I haven't. I still remember. I do. Clearly. And, precisely.

These unwanted reflections.

I know myself no longer...

A blonde woman.

A pool of blood.

A young man.

A deep cut...

Book Reviews

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy

Hafsa Shah

On the back cover are the words, “How to tell a shattered story? By slowly becoming everybody. No. By slowly becoming everything.” *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy’s much awaited second work of fiction does exactly that; it’s a story of inclusivity, of home and of borders. The happiness that Roy refers to in the title is the joy of belonging, of togetherness and of immersing one’s self in all that one experiences. It is a story of empathy and unlike her first novel, this one is not a tragedy from the beginning.

The story follows the lives of Anjum, Tilo, Biplap Dasgupta, Saddam Hussain and Revathy. Anjum (from the Urdu word Anjuman) is a hermaphrodite, someone born with both male and female genitals. Like her name, Anjum is quite literally the ‘mehfil’ of the entire story as her narrative accommodates other sub-narratives woven inside the novel that brings together a diverse group of people. The authenticity of Anjum’s experiences as a Trans subject and the Roy’s representation of the Trans community is what stands out in the novel. Roy does not labour to establish Anjum as a transsexual, it is clear that she is. Rather than proving her transsexuality the narrative follows Anjum’s daily trials over the years which we find missing in mainstream novels on the subject such as Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*.

The simultaneous convergence and diversion of multiple storylines challenges the conventional linearity of the plot and the temporal space it occupies. Tilo, Biplap Dasgupta, Musa and Naga are university fellows who cross each other’s paths throughout the story as it winds from old Delhi to new Delhi, Kashmir and Jantar Mantar; their stories reveal the present politics of

India. And the clear references to BJP and the current Prime Minister are unabashedly brave. The stories of Saddam Hussain, an animal lover who is far from Saddam Hussain, the dictator and Revathy, who is wrapped up in the politics of India as a Naxalite Maoist represent another India, an India of the rejected.

The book is 'to, the unconsoled' and thus is a ray of hope, a refuge or at the very least an account of the oppressed, the exiled non-conformists and the unconventional. Only in this respect it is similar to her first novel *The God of Small Things*. Her latest work is not as intricate in its emotions nor as confined to a singular setting. It moves beyond Kerala and frees itself of the boundaries which held *The God of Small Things* together. In this novel, the entire country of India is on view as seen in a concave mirror. It is this turn from the last novel, the expectations built up by her readers of another masterpiece and the delving and dissecting of the political landscape that has dampened the expectations of her readers. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a universe of its own which is so familiar and alien at the same time that it'll resonate long after you shut the book.

If the question still remains whether it's worth the twenty years gap? Well, probably... probably not. But I will tell you this, it sure can't be skipped.

Green Poems by Gulzar

Muhammad Ali

Literature, in the recent times, has become less ethereal and more earthly. To elaborate, literary works are no more considered as creations of people oblivious to their surroundings, locked up in ivory towers and putting impalpable thoughts into words. Instead, what is more revered in the twenty first century are writings that are practically connected to the environment we are living in. Eco-criticism, Oceanic Studies and Critical Animal Theory, to name a few, are some of the efforts of literary theorists in this regard, so that the entire ecosystem of which the human species is just one fragment be attended to while reading a piece of creative writing. It can be argued that the Romantic poets gave as much importance to nature as the literary environmental scholars endeavor to give. But what sets modern environmental literature apart from other nature-oriented writings is the former's attempt at making the reader realize the gravity of the environmental crisis, which is no more an imminent crisis, but one that has already smitten the world we are living in. By infusing this realization into the reader, such literature also seeks to bring about a practical environmental change.

Green Poems, a collection of poems by Gulzar translated by Pavan K. Varma and published by Penguin Books in 2014 is one such example of environmental literature emerging from South Asia. While Gulzar is someone in whose works nature recurs in the form of moons, mountains, rivers and sunsets, *Green Poems*, as a poetry book, emerges as different because of the very motive that lies behind its production; to give a voice to the gradually deteriorating ecosystem and express its pain by making nature a narrator itself. *Green Poems*, thus, does not always present a human point of view to describe the catastrophe which has been unleashed on nature, but birds, rivers,

mountains and wells come to the fore themselves as narrators to talk about the maltreatment they witness at the hands of humans.

An example would be “The Story of a River”, in which a river seems to have grown fed up of the purposes for which it is used, such as boating and water-migration. It is no more ready to carry “Boats full of people to the other side” but wishes to “remain motionless for” at least “one evening”, so that it can come face to face with its real form, in which it was given birth to ere human civilization began. Similarly, in “Trees”, Gulzar refutes the otherwise romantic idea of plucking flowers and presenting them as gifts to beloveds. Instead, he expresses his dissatisfaction at the act by saying, “The moment anything emerges which is fragrant/ We chop off its neck!” The poet goes on to expand the idea by moving from mere flowers to complete trees that are cut in order to make way for construction. “The Tree at the Corner” is being cut by the “municipal authorities” and the poet does not have the courage to go near it, lest he be reminded of the good times he spent under its shade as a child who would climb up and pluck mangoes from its branches. The poet does not care to replace the term “municipal authorities” by a milder term but says it in a manner as emotionless as the act of authorities itself. As in “The Story of a River”, Gulzar presents the idea of water-usage as painful to water in “Thimpu” as well, for he considers the idea of hydro-electricity as smarting to the rivers. “Sometimes, their waters are whipped to produce electricity”, says the poet, and also goes on to tell what he thinks must be the condition of the rivers when they are used for such purposes so that humans may live in comfort: “The delicate bodies of the rivers must be breaking.” Trees, once again, receive the poet’s sympathy in “The Fingers of the Sun”, in which the act of using knives to leave marks on trees has been pointed out. Empathizing with a tree the trunk of which has been used in such a manner by humans, the poet makes the tree the narrator itself, which, like an abused child, says, “People do bad things on me,

and ---/ Gouge out their names with knives on my thighs”. It is interesting how by using phrases like “bad things” and words like “thighs”, the poet conveys the idea that a tree being scraped with knives is no less than a human who is sexually assaulted. There is also the sun that comes down to “caress the thighs of the tree.” Both the ideas of love-making, one tender and one forced, make their way into the poem to tell how natural elements complement each other’s existence while humans keep themselves at a superior position. At one point, the plants that are not taken care of are also referred to as “Dalit plants”. In “The Burial of a Well”, the description of a well’s closure using bricks and rods has been given, along-with the predicament of the dove who used to bathe in that well. If one were to extract a poem that expresses complete dissatisfaction at human civilization despite all of its efforts to produce incredible creations, it would be “Such a Small Pathway”. The poem tells how none of the metal roads built by humans can reach a mountain top. Instead, a lean pathway emerging naturally between the mountains can do the job quite well and easily.

If Pavan K. Varma’s suggestion that “Green Poems” is a book that should be taught in educational institutions is considered, then one realizes that the book is not only filled with poems that point out nature’s maltreatment being carried out by humans, but also with poems that attempt to understand the natural processes that take place, both inside and above the earth. What Gulzar sees as scenes of wonderment are scientific questions that can be placed before pupils for research purposes.

The entire process of rainfall has been presented as a procedure that needs to be understood in “What the Clouds Conceal”. “Where the drops of rain are?/ Where are the hailstorms hidden? Where do they keep the drums whose resounding startles children?” are the questions the poem raises. The mysterious depths of the waters are also made the point of focus in the book, the specific

poem on them being “River Mandavi”. The water body’s vastness and its never-ending panoramic view are what keep the poet in a quizzical state, for he is not able to understand whether Mandavi is a “river or an ocean?” and “If a river, then how wide...”? An attempt at understanding what the earth does below its surface to make room for roots has been made in “The Magical Earth”. Be it fruits, flowers or trees, the poet expresses wonder at all of the natural creations, throughout trying to understand the incomprehensible process that takes place when seeds are planted.

It is interesting how Gulzar’s style of penning free-verse and open poems suits all of the themes presented in “Green Poems”, for closures are not possible until and unless all of the questions the book is brimming with are answered: Why are humans doing to nature and what they are doing? Will the maltreatment ever come to an end? How does nature work? After all the discoveries the human species has made, are there still some mysteries of mother-nature left to probe into? When, and how, will humans be able to grasp all that is hidden beneath the earth and in the depths of the sea and in the clouds in the sky?

Moreover, the title of the book falls perfectly into the framework of Eco-criticism, which is also referred to as Green Studies by British scholars. Unlike his poem, “Raat aur Din Kitne Khoobsurat Do Waqt Hain” in which nature forms an inspiration for poetic minds, in “Green Poems”, the central focus of the poet’s attention is nature and how human beings treat nature.

The sub-continent being a region the major portion of which is composed of rivers and thus wells and streams, *Green Poems* becomes a very important literary work in order to realize the gravity of the crisis we are in as a population indifferent to its eco-system. By describing the state of dried up rivers, buried wells and cut-down trees that bring about the wild side of water instead, the book inculcates a realization that such acts need to be attended to as soon as possible, so that the surrounding environment can be saved from further damage.

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