

A Dialogic Critique of Post-Colonial Hybridity in *Twilight in Delhi and White Mughals*

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Abstract

This study is a critique of hybridity in the light of Bakhtinian Theory of Dialogism/Hetroglossia with reference to Post Colonial texts, Twilight in Delhi and White Mughals. Hetroglossia which Bakhtin hails as the characteristic stylistic feature of the novel, celebrates not, as structuralism does, the systematic nature of language, the variety of social speech types, and the diversity of voices interacting with one another. Center to Bakhtinain belief, language is fundamentally dialogic. This study is particularly to explore the role of dialogism as social hetroglot phenomenon. Hetroglossia can be studied as a social force which stratifies or directs the unitary system of language into its own ideological and formal orientation, and how it relates to the literary analysis of the particular texts and other concepts mentioned above. This paper analyzes Ahmad Ali's Twilight in Delhi and White Mughals to investigate the essence of dialogic hetroglossia that is directly proportionate with cultural hybridity.

Keywords: Cultural and Linguistic Hybridity, Dialogism/Hetroglossia, Postcolonialism

Introduction

According to Bakhtin, between every word and object, between every word and subject, between every word and respondents, there is an “elastic environment of other,” and this “other” decides and values the judgments and interpretations in speech. Later on, these utterances of speaking objects make a particular discourse. In my exposition, Bakhtin dialogism has been strongly rooted in philosophical speculation which he got with inspiration from Dostoevsky, Burber or any other. According to Bakhtin, it is important to place text in any historical context so that the underlying heterogeneity of various voices and contexts may be explored. In this way, the social forces and genres incorporating a language can be analyzed.

This study is particularly to explore the role of dialogism as social hetroglot phenomenon. Hetroglossia can be studied as a social force which stratifies or directs the unitary system of language into its own ideological and formal orientation, and how it relates to the literary analysis of the particular texts and other concepts mentioned above. On a broader note, hetroglossia is not a literary concept which can be applied on a text only. As it is evident, hetro (diverse) and glossia (speeches), language itself is a hetro glot social phenomenon which promotes hybridity in society. Every language or speech of social hetroglossia is dialogically oriented towards each other. It is an evolving process in which each language holds its own identity and ideological truth about the world. This

identical representation of one's culture in other cultures promotes different social identities. Each language in heteroglossia promotes its own language and socio-ideological requirements, and at the same time, it participates in speech diversity that surrounds it.

According to Bakhtin, each word/utterance is thus, imbued with different accents and intentions that stratify it from within.¹ To view this process, in Bakhtin's view, is a constant and simultaneous play between centralizing and decentralizing forces of language or what he names it, as centripetal and centrifugal forces. These forces can be further interpreted as post colonial and colonial. The centripetal forces in language represent language as "unitary language," which operates in the very middle of heteroglossia. The evolution of language promotes further stratification in language by giving space to different dialects existing in the society.

1. Textualizing Hybridity and Heteroglossia in Post-Colonialism

Cultural blend strengthens globalization and develops cultural harmony between varieties of culture. It not only infiltrates different cultures but also becomes an essential factor for survival. As an indispensable means of globalization, cultural hybridity plays a vital role in this process and will inevitably bear the imprint of both cultures in upcoming breed. In this process, those cultures which dislocate their position, find a new place in global picture of the world. The sense of foreignization and domestication has always been in confrontation with those who consider their cultural supremacy to be accepted by the "others."

On the other hand, culturally assimilated societies place their identities in a new context and this dislocation forces them to accept new cultural identity. Typically, this term has been interpreted in a very pessimistic way. The term hybridity has been related to homogenized Western culture which accelerates encroachment in different cultures and causes deconstruction. The same notion was spread by Bakhtin in dialogism as heteroglossia. He considers that language is a dialogue and this dialogism caters for different heteroglot in the society by giving space to homogeneity. According to Bakhtin, "In this way, every concrete utterance of speaking subjects' serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces is brought to bear." This very essence of dialogic heteroglossia is directly proportionate with cultural hybridity. A hybrid culture brings homogeneity in society. Every utterance participates in dialogic process in its centripetal forces and then, it leaves its centripetal forces for society.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed for this paper was the analysis of the text in the light of dialogism as post colonial critique. The exhaustive analysis and interpretation of the text was a critique on post colonial hybridity and ample cross references were given to prove the thesis statement.

3. Discussion and Textual Analysis

Ahmad Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* represents an explicit picture of desired change in society. Many of the characters were monotonous in their present

situation and aspire for a commendable change in their lives. This aspiration gave space to a hybrid culture in a very traditional outset of that Hindustani culture. The very title of the novel, "Twilight in Delhi," deals with the dying culture and civilization of the Muslims of India in the earlier part of the twentieth century. It was a ray of hope for those who were facing cultural demolition under the supremacy of the "Foreigners." The colonizers, with their colonized mindset, were bringing about a new change in society which caused a cultural disposition of colonized societies. This sense of domestication was hindering the process of cultural hybridity. Mir Nihal was unable to accept that change in society and considered it a threat to his domestication. Colonized people, as suggested by Afzal Khan, are displaced in their cultural and historical context. They need to invent their past in order to save themselves from disintegration.

Ahmad Ali uses the symbols of cat and snake to explain the plight of colonizers and colonized people in India. Like the snake in the text, the supreme cultures could not engulf the native cultures completely. Mir Nihal, the ambassador of the native culture, scornfully rejects the use of *Firangi* clothes. Another postcolonial writer, Paul Scott, in his novel "The Jewel in the Crown" mentions British oppression as the "rape" of the sub-continent. The very spirit of resistance sprouts another ideology which later on brings chaos and vacuum in the society. While using the word Home Rule Movement, he incorporates that people were resistant about the infiltration of colonizers. He reflects that colonized nations oppose the attack of "Marginal" at their cultures. They consider it an oppression which threatens them for the acceptance of their cultural invasion. In this way, Ahmad Ali refers to Edward Said and many other post-colonial critics and authors who rejected the supremacy of one culture over another.

Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* very explicitly gives the working of the societies and also sums up the relationship between societies. He writes that domination and inequities of power and wealth are two perennial facts of human society.²

This very aptly describes Darwin's notion of the 'Survival of the fittest.' History books are replete with incidents where many powerful nations overtook many weak nations. Many incidents stand as testimony to the basic instinct of occupying and asserting supremacy. Colonization was one such event that changed the face of the earth with the expansion of different European countries beyond its territories. The event of colonization not only shaped history of the world but also affected the culture, identities and psychology of the colonized people. The process of colonialism defined and constructed the realities and relationships between the colonizer and the colonized.

Ania Loomba writes,

Colonialism everywhere locked the original inhabitants and the new comers into most complex and traumatic relationships in human history. The process of forming a community in the new land necessarily meant unforming or forming the communities that existed there already.³

Post colonial world is thus not an isolated and static world. It is a world of mixtures and new born identities. This very phenomenon of embracing new culture and identity is explored and questioned by many postcolonial writers. One of them is Ahmed Ali. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* reflects the historical and cultural past of the city of Delhi. It is through this novel that the writer raises questions regarding the notions of culture, ethnicity and identity. All these issues of locked relationships between the colonizer and the colonized are woven around the concept of Hybridity. Hybridity brings forward the contestation between the indigenous cultural identities and foreign cultural identities.

Hybridity is a biological term that is defined as 'the process which produces a composite of mixed origin by cross breeding.' The composite product thereby has dominant attributes of both the original species yet it is different from the parent species. This idea of hybridity later became the cynosure of post colonial discourses. In the beginning, the post colonial texts' discourses focused on celebrating and retrieving the indigenous pure identities that gave the colonized state a sense of national identity. But later analysis revealed that colonization was not a static process; instead, the constant exposure of the dominant culture raised questions regarding identities and fixity of cultural identities and led one to believe that there were no pure cultures and philistine identities. In the context of post colonial literature, hybridity refers to the 'creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization.'⁴

Ahmed Ali, through his novel *Twilight in Delhi*, brings forward a picture of a family whose head Mir Nihal stands against the hybrid identities and culture. Ahmed Ali, through Mir Nihal's character, highlights the notion of purity of culture, race and identity.

Mir Nihal laments the loss of pure culture and says,

New ways and ideas had come into basing. A hybrid culture which had been nothing in it of the past was forcing itself upon Hindustan, a hodge-podge of Indian and Western ways.⁵

In this statement, the word hybrid therefore becomes important. In *Twilight in Delhi*, Asghar, like Aziz in *Passage to India*, is an example of hybrid culture. He is introduced to us as 'the upper buttons of his Sherwani are open and show the collar of the English shirt.'⁶ And Mir Nihal, who is the embodiment of the static, stable culture, sees this, and says, 'you are again wearing those dirty English boots! I don't like them. I will have no aping of the Farangis in my house, throw them away.'⁷ Mir Nihal despises the emerging hybrid culture. Asghar's wearing of the English shirt shows that he is trying to create a 'Third Space' for himself. Bhabha says that:

All cultural statements and systems are constructed in this Third Space of enunciation. Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, and which makes the claim to hierarchical purity of culture untenable.⁸

Later in the novel, when Saeed Hasan sees the English furniture and dressing gown, he says,

What a pity. Our people used to sit on the floor. It could be used to sleep on and other purposes. But we are forgetting our own culture and learning the ways of others. The virtue of constancy is dying from the world.⁹

Through both these characters, Ahmed Ali brings to light the problem that whether or not it is possible to retain and maintain one's culture. In *Twilight in Delhi*, there is a lament of loss of that culture, but at the same time it highlights the reasons that stimulate the decay in the Delhi culture.

Culture is defined as 'the taste in art and manners that are favored by a social group or the attitudes and behavior that are characteristic of a particular social group.'¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha defines culture as 'a strategy of survival, a homogenizing force.'

Manners, behavior, attitudes and survival strategy in a way, sum up the culture of the city of Delhi. Culture in other words, represents the whole ethos of people or community giving them a sense of belonging. Ahmed Ali, though nostalgic about the lost culture of the city of Delhi, seems to be missing out the essential attributes that make a culture evolve and stand the ravages of time. At the very outset of the novel, we get Ahmed Ali's constricted view of the term culture. He writes,

It was the city of kings and monarchs, of poets and story tellers, courtiers and nobles. But no king lives there today, and the poets are feeling the lack of patronage; the old inhabitants, though still alive, have lost their pride and grandeur under the foreign yoke.¹¹

Every culture has certain spaces that are to be filled in by other cultures. Throughout the novel, the culture of the city of Delhi is described through the traditions and customs, kite and pigeon flying, call to prayers, *qawwals*, mystics, remembrance of the Mughal glory on the one hand, and on the other, the smell of gutters is always in the background. The culture of a city is not only made up of such practices; rather it also involves political, social and economic concerns as well. Cultures are representatives of whole metaphysics of existence. These were the spaces through which foreign culture infiltrated. These shortcomings in the Mughal culture, therefore, set the decline in the rich culture of Delhi. In addition to it, Ahmed Ali removes the misconception through his novel that no culture can boast about purity. Only those cultures survive that have the ability to draw something from foreign cultures. English culture had imbibed the learning of the Renaissance period and practically used it, thereby becoming the most vibrant and domineering culture. Colonial encounters make it difficult to maintain an isolated culture. Colonial cultures are complex mixtures of their original parts, where these parts do not remain separate from each other but blend into something new. The hybrid nature of a colonial culture means that all participants in that culture; colonizers and colonized have vital inputs into the structure of power, domination and resistance that result.

Hybridization not only results in something new but also is a means of breaking the boundaries between the dominate power and subservient people. Adoption of the foreign culture therefore is a subversive technique as well.

In the *City of Djinnns* and *White Mughals* as well, William Dalrymple refers to the hybridity that resulted because of the colonial cultural encounters. In the *White Mughals*, as the title signifies, Dalrymple defines the colonial encounter in terms of 'exchange and negotiation rather than dominance and subjugation.'¹² In the *City of Djinnns*, William Dalrymple refers to the hybridity that resulted because of the colonial cultural encounters. New Delhi was blossoming and old Delhi crumbling; this has been highlighted by the author. Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown are hybrid mixtures of both British and Indian systems. They tell Dalrymple, 'you see we are not Britishers. We are something different and our roots are deeper than those of the Indians. Don't look at our skin, look at our hearts.'¹³ So these Anglo-Indians along with the Indians have created a third space for themselves that gives them a sense of belonging.

Concepts like contact zone and the resultant cultural interactions and exchanges complicate the understanding of the colonial encounters. Because they show how colonialism breathes ideologies of difference, and brings different people into intimate contact with each other. These new identities that are generated then initiate the debate in post-colonial texts of adoption of new identities and rejection of indigenous identities.

The first question that comes to mind is; what is identity and indigenous identity? Indigenous is something that pertains to the peculiar geographical area. Identity is the 'individual characteristics by which a thing or person is recognized or known.'¹⁴ A person's identity is not wholly defined by the indigenous identity because it only forms a fraction of identity. Moreover indigenous identity like identity is subjected to cultural polarities and cultural dynamics. Cultural dynamics change with the passage of time. For example colonialism brought forward the decline of the Mughal Empire and rise of British Raj. So with the ever changing phenomenon of transience and flux, the notion of indigenous identities become ambivalent. Identity and culture can be compared to Heraclitus' dictum of mutability. He says, 'Into the same river we go down and we do not go down because into the same river no man can enter twice; ever it flows in and flows out.'¹⁵ In these ever changing phenomena of identity and culture, the idea of indigenous becomes redundant. Fanon wrote:

A national culture is not folklore, nor can an abstract populism that believes it discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions... A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.¹⁶

These lines stand as a testimony to the fact that even national identities are created through the people who are subjected to various influences that seep through the contact zone with different cultures. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, wrote,

Fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.¹⁷

The notion of hybridity therefore, questions the essentialism of culture and identity. Moreover, Bhabha was of the view that the colonial encounters could not produce 'stable and fixed identities, and suggested that cross-overs of various sorts or hybridities and ambivalence more adequately describe the dynamics of the colonial encounter.' The question of retaining indigenous identities becomes impossible. Because the process of colonization does not keep the colonizer and the colonized as separate entities; rather there is an adoption of the best of other culture.

In the *City of Djinnns*, William Dalrymple and in *Twilight in Delhi*, Ahmed Ali, both describe the gradual changes in the culture and city of Delhi. These changes are not there in culture but they relate how time affects the whole makeup of a society, its people and culture. In the *City of Djinnns*, Dalrymple's meeting with Shamim, who was the resident of the Old Delhi, expresses his grief for the changing hybrid culture. He tells Dalrymple, 'My brother cannot write in Urdu. Like many of the young men he has no knowledge of his own culture. Only he is interested in photography.'¹⁸ So the change is mourned by Shamim who ignores the importance of modern times...Further the episode between the author and two sisters Phyllis and Edith Haxby tell about the Jewish prostitutes. Phyllis says, 'They are Jews. All of them. They are as fair as lilies but they wear these brown masks to pass off as natives'.¹⁹ This embraces Fanon's idea that he described in the *Black Skins, White Masks*. Fanon's 'psychic trauma' is amplified by Bhabha who says,

The colonial identities are always a matter of flux and agony...Fanon's image of the black skin/white masks is not a neat division but a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once...²⁰

Hybridity then becomes a safe means for getting out of such traumas which work as dynamics of resistance as well. Moreover, hybridity moves in multidimensional planes embracing the political and economic motives. The economic dependency further complicates the process of hybridization.

In short the, complex relationships between the dominant and subjugated people, and the transformation of time periods in them have the inherent ability to evolve. Man's identity is a complex amalgamation of different facets undergoing changes all the time. The notion of indigenous confronts changes, so much so that it becomes virtually impossible to retrieve those values. Besides, a culture only evolves as long as it has the flexibility of receiving. This intimate contact with the other cultures breeds vitality into the very dynamics of culture. The idea that hybrid identities negate the indigenous identities therefore, becomes superfluous because nothing is permanent and all types of identities are not essential; rather they are constructed. Hybrid identities in spirit bring together and therefore, instead of negating one's identity, reinforce them.

4. Conclusion

The present study of the text shows that Ahmad Ali in the *Twilight in Delhi* has deliberately illustrated the glory of the sub-continent in such a picturesque way that it seems that the writer himself is nostalgic of the past Muslim culture as

claimed by some critics of the text understudy. He confirms that colonizers brought about the miserable plight of the colonized. The influence of colonial ideology on the colonized people gave birth to new identities which bred hybridity and mimicry in that particular era. Though Ali condemns the superiority and supremacy of one culture over another, yet he considers that cultural hybridity can bring positive change and homogeneity in society if there is no colonizer nor any colonized.

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