



RESEARCH PAPER

Burden of Exile and Identity Crisis in Rizwan Akhtar's *Pakistani Story* (from real to comic): A Postcolonial Critique

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| PAPER INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| <p>Received: April 07, 2020</p> <p>Accepted: June 15, 2020</p> <p>Online: June 30, 2020</p> <p>Keywords: Ambivalence, Clash of Civilization, Cultural Hybridity, Exile, Identity Crisis Post Colonialism</p> <p>*Corresponding Author:</p> <p>director.glc@gift.edu.pk</p> | <p>The study endeavors to analyze the reverberations of cultural hybridity in terms of sexuality and identity crisis caused by clash of civilization in Rizwan Akhtar's Poem: <i>Pakistani story (from real to comic)</i>. The writer on one hand is writing back to an imperial centre in order to defy its hegemony and on the other hand is found encountered with cultural fusion rising through clash of civilization. The entire postcolonial literature exhibits a kind of cultural hybridity that gives birth to a confused identity of oriens. Love-hate relationships, contradictions between 'self' and 'other' native-alien clash of cultures, hybridity, realization, nostalgia, mimicking tendency, sense of alienation and ultimate disillusionment prevail throughout the poem in one way or the other. Here, the paper discusses the relevance of Bhabha's theory of 'Cultural Hybridity' to understand the quintessential postcolonial 'halfness' which gets a fair handling by the selected writer. The natives try to adopt the invader's culture in order to get acceptance but are always treated as others and inferiors. In exasperation, they espouse extremist ideas and assume bitter shades of indigenous identity. This article will explore the issues of identity in the light of Postcolonial critical approaches and concludes the burden of undecided citizenship in exile.</p> |

Introduction

Rizwan Akhtar is an acclaimed Pakistani English Poet who is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Punjab University Lahore, Pakistan. He presents himself a Diasporic poet in his poem *Pakistani Story (From real to comic)*, who at the one hand writes backs to centre in order to challenge their hegemony, on the other hand he faces severe form of hybridity while living abroad. The term "hybridity" has been most recently associated with the work of Homi. K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Hybridity has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse which simply means cross-cultural exchange (Ashcraft 108,109). According to Bhabha a foreign

culture and language leave the colonized in the state of hybrid situation with a result of ambivalence; which is a simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object, person or action. Adopted into post-colonial theory by Homi Bhabha; it describes the complex amalgam of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the rapport between colonized and colonizer. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized is not simply and completely against the colonizer.

Akhtar's poem having satire hints at the poet's being in a state of hybridity with the burden of undecided citizenship as he hints at the start of the poem by using the word "Paki" and the pun related to this word. He declares his tongue "heavier" because it has the burden of hybrid linguistic encounter. His hybridity reflected in his dressing also highlights his undecided citizenship, as he laments for not being able to wear his traditional Pakistani dress because the colonizer's land is not fit for that sort of dress. He declares himself in the "white butcher's coat" which means he has ambivalent aspects of being attracted towards colonizer's language but he also depicts his own culture with a remorseful note as his identity as colonized follows him in the form of a ghost that "speaks nothing but asks for more"(Akhtar). The paper concludes that the hybrid identity and burden of Akhtar's undecided citizenship clearly hints upon Bhabha's post-colonial perspective in his said poem as he remains confused till the end of the poem with two cultures; one is his own and the second is the colonizer's culture.

Material and Methods

This research is qualitative by nature. The theory of 'Cultural hybridity' by Homi K. Bhabha would serve as the research framework. The analysis of the said poem has been carried out by using insights from the said theory. Hybridity is a cross between two separate races, plants or culture. Hybridity refers to the transcultural state which comes out as the outcome of colonialism. Homi K. Bhabha is an Indian scholar and theorist. He is the Professor of English and American Literature and Language, and the Director of the Mahindra Humanities Centre at Harvard University. He is one of the most influential figures in contemporary post-colonial studies, and has developed a number of the field's neologisms and key concepts, such as hybridity, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence. Such terms describe ways in which colonized people have resisted the power of the colonizer, according to Bhabha's theory. In 2012, he received the Padma Bhushan award in the field of literature and education from the Indian government.

Research Framework:

The term 'Hybridity' refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species as used in horticulture,. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc. Linguistic examples include pidgin and Creole languages, and echo the foundational use of the term by the linguist and cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to suggest the disruptive and transfiguring power of multivocal language situations and, by extension, of multivocal narratives. The idea of polyphony about voices in society is implied also in Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque, which emerged in the Middle Ages when 'a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture' (Holquist 4) calls the 'Third Space of enunciation' (37). Cultural identity

always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical 'purity' of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate: It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. That defines, "For a willingness to descend into that alien territory may open the way to conceptualize an international culture, based notion hybridity" (Ashcraft 10).

Discussion

Hybridity has become most widely employed and constantly disputed term in the postcolonial paradigm globally. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that commonly refer to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Rizwan Akhtar in his poem *Pakistani Story (from real to comic)* presents himself as a Diasporic poet ,who at the one hand writes backs to centre in order to challenge its hegemony, on the other hand he faces severe form of hybridity while experiencing self-exile in U.K. He is the victim of hybrid identity. He is feeling himself divided into two cultures and civilizations. Rizwan Akhtar takes a start with the funny remark which is hinted at the colonizer's thoughts of considering the poet as Pakistani. He says that in colonizer's culture we are called "Paki". They use this word in a derogatory sense but Akhtar says that the colonizers do not know the real essence and true meaning of the word "Paki" which means "pure" in our own language Urdu. So Rizwan Akhtar chuckles on colonizers' being called us Paki. He uses many metaphors to describe his point of view by giving details that he covers the distance of eight thousand miles and leaves behind the 'droning afternoons of Lahore. He then uses another metaphor "a book of history shoved into a wrong shelf" (Akhtar 108) because he is in the colonizer's land now. The English culture and norms are so well rooted in the poet's personality that these norms have become his identity that his mother has a traditional Pakistani dress for him with embroidery he even does not wear that dress because the English winters shape him only for western dresses. He wears that western dress but he is in the state of ambivalence of liking that western culture at times, and often is wistfully missing his birth place where he was brought up and spent many years of his life. Bhabha says that in the process of hybridization, no one remains pure in the post colonial process .The poet is also facing hybridity and ambivalence resulting in the third space of enunciation as he says in his poem:

With a Paki flourish
I slip into a white butcher's coat
Chop the grammar, skin the verbs
Mince the personal pronouns
Separate bones from the fleshy sound
Hook broths with a gruff
Thump the gurgling till
With the English huff (Akhtar 109)

Ambivalence is a term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a

simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action (Young 161). Adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are 'complicit' and some 'resistant', ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. Ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself as nurturing, at the same time. Most importantly in Bhabha's theory, however, ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disturbs the simple relationship between colonizers and colonized. Ambivalence is therefore an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse for the colonizer. The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values – that is, 'mimic' the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be *ambivalent* or 'two-powered'. The effect of this ambivalence (the simultaneous attraction and repulsion) is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse (Ashcraft 10).

Rizwan Akhtar gives the examples of foods originally of his own country by comparing them with the English culture also differentiating the taste and texture of Indian foods highlighting the two nation theory. While living in the colonizer's land he declares his birth place 'the land of pure' (Rizwan 109). In the next part of the poem, he wishes for "*desiclubs*" missing his own country then he talks about 'Hijab'. Actually, he is now in the Third space of enunciation. Homi Bhabha talks about *a third space of enunciation*, a *hybrid space* or a *new position* in which *communication* is possible. Third Space theory emerges from the socio-cultural tradition in psychology identified with *Lev Vygotsky*. Sociocultural approaches are concerned with the "constitutive role of culture in mind, i.e., on how mind develops by incorporating the community's shared artifacts accumulated over generations". Bhabha applies socio culturalism directly to the postcolonial condition, where there are, "unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation". For Bhabha, such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration as it makes possible the emergence of an "interstitial" agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. The "interstitial perspective" as Bhabha calls it replaces the "polarity of a pre-figurative self-generating nation 'in-itself' and extrinsic other nations" with the notion of cultural liminality within the nation. The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse "the agency of a people" is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performativity, which is to say, between the peoples' status as historical objects of a nationalist pedagogy and their ability to perform themselves as subjects of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originally national presence. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the *partial culture* from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and

versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: “*the outside of the inside; the part in the whole*”.

This “new position” Bhabha proposes is closely related to the “homeless” existence of post-colonial persons. It certainly cannot be assumed to be an independent third space already there, a “no-man’s-land” between the nations. Instead, a way of cultural syncretisation, i.e. a medium of negotiating cultural antagonisms, has to be created. Cultural difference has to be acknowledged: “Culture does imply difference, but the differences now are no longer, if you wish, taxonomical; they are interactive and refractive”. This position emphasizes, contrary to the too facile assumption of world literature and world culture as the stages of a multicultural cosmopolitanism already in existence, that the “intellectual trade” takes place mostly on the borders and *in the border crossings between cultures* where meanings and values are not codified but misunderstood, misrepresented, even falsely adopted. Bhabha explains how beyond fixed cultural (ethnic, gender- and class-related) identities, so-called “hybrid” identities are formed by discontinuous translation and negotiation. Hybridity, liminality, “interrogatory, interstitial space” are the positive values Bhabha opposes to a retrograde historicism that continues to dominate Western critical thinking, a “linear narrative of the nation,” with its claims for the “holism of culture and community” and a “fixed horizontal nation-space”. We must, he argues eloquently undo such thinking with its facile binary oppositions. Rather than emphasizing the opposition between First World and Third World nations, between colonizer and colonized, men and women, black and white, straight and gay, Bhabha would have it, we might more profitably focus on the border situations and thresholds as the sites where identities are performed and contested. Bhabha says, “Hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge”. Rizwan’s shift towards the celebration of Eid is the best example of his state of being hybrid and having ambivalence and third space of enunciation. As he writes about women who are displaced:

On Eids their dreams

Return with vermicelli
Sprinkled with nuts and tears
Women release from etched duppatas
Their wages of domesticity
But men stay in Namaz Caps,
Yell and curse at the western sins
Flatter their dyed beard with a grin (Rizwan 110)

In the last part of the poem, Rizwan describes the ghost of his native culture following him everywhere. Actually ghost is his past from which he cannot get rid of. The ghost is not the real entity as it represents Pakistani culture and past reality of the poet. Now the ghost of Pakistan is hugging him and following him because he is displaced now in another land. As he says:

After years of travelling
In the underground
The seat next to me has a ghost
I hug it and it follows me

To the gas stations and roads
Speaks nothing but asks for more (Rizwan 110)

The last part of the poem, Rizwan Akhtar has very artistically concluded with the famous verses of Faiz Ahmad Faiz:

I turn on a nazam
Hum ka thehre ajnabi
Itni mudaratun ka bad
The cab halts abruptly
The Tower bridge folds
The Paki cab becomes
A dream toad
Hops over the bridge
The eyes go wide
The English search me
In their data base and tides (Rizwan 111)

He concludes the poem on a very serious note by highlighting the colonial impacts on the colonized people when they are displaced and are in a state of hybrid identity. Rizwan says that such a person has the burden of undecided citizenship which is the tragedy of every displaced and colonized person.

Conclusion

After an intensive study of Rizwan Akhtar's *Pakistani story (from real to comic)*, it is concluded that postcolonial diasporic literature heavily relies upon concepts of 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence'. The people from native culture at once attract towards their master's culture to make themselves equalize in rank but the reality is totally against of it because they are always treated as people belonging to a descendant race. They are just like apes which mimic what they perceive. They become disillusioned by the fantasy of colonial modernity but realize this bitter fact by suffering from racial discrimination as they are always known as 'Brutal' and 'Primitive' because whites never accepts them at par. And in such challenging circumstances, they return to their roots and struggle to find out their own individual identity.

The whole poem of Rizwan Akhtar is an embodiment of his own experience of undecided citizenship; one can correlate with. Rizwan describes the ghost of his native culture following him everywhere. Actually ghost is his past from which he cannot get rid of. The ghost is not the real entity as it represents Pakistani culture and past reality of the poet. Now the ghost of Pakistan is hugging him and following him because he is displaced now in another land. He is living abroad having the burden of being into two cultures. Bhabha says that in the process of hybridization, no one remains pure in the post colonial process. He declares himself in the "white butcher's coat" which means he has ambivalent aspects of being attracted towards colonizer's language but he also depicts his own culture with a remorseful note as his identity as colonized follows him in the form of a ghost that "speaks nothing but asks for more". The poet is also facing hybridity and ambivalence resulting in the third space of enunciation. The paper concludes that the hybrid identity

and burden of undecided citizenship of Akhtar is clearly hinted at with Bhabha post-colonial perspective in his said poem, as he is confused till the end of the poem with two cultures; one is his own and the second is the colonizer's culture. The poem does validate the postcolonial critical perspective that the forced identity is almost the same but neverquite.

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