

LOSS OF IDENTITY IN MONIZA ALVI'S POEM "PRESENTS FROM MY AUNTS IN PAKISTAN" A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the poem of Moniza Alvi, Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan (1993), in terms of the theory of hybridity by Homi Bhabha, and his ideas of ambivalence and the third space. Placing Alvi in the context of Commonwealth women diasporic poetry, the article demonstrates that her cultural identity negotiation is a symptom of the UK-South Asian Commonwealth relations tensions after 1945. The study finds out how Alvi's poetic persona depicts the fragmented identity of the postcolonial subject, enchanted between the cultural expectations of her Pakistani heritage and the Western environment and inhabits how these items are Commonwealth signifiers, connecting personal identity to migration and colonial trade histories. Instead of making identity appear as merely lost, Alvi introduces hybridity as a re-definition that is created within Commonwealth diasporic networks. This study combines the Bhabha theory with a Commonwealth-specific emphasis to demonstrate how the work of Alvi can shed light on the cultural negotiation of diasporic women and also help to inform the wider discussion of hybridity, citizenship, and postcolonial belonging in Commonwealth literature.

Key Words: Moniza Alvi, Commonwealth diaspora, Cultural hybridity, sectorial symbolism, Third space, and UK-Pakistani Identity

1. Introduction

Post colonialism is a representation of any race, culture, ethnicity or an individual's identity. A colonized country is said to have attained freedom once it is free from the colonial rule. It is because of colonization that their culture no longer remains pure and calling it pure is disputable (Dizayi, 2015). Post colonialism has many themes such as cultural dominance, racism, identity crises, racial discrimination, inequality and hybridization. Also, there are some styles which are representative of the colonized people. Many post-colonial writers have reflected it in their works. Thus, it is found in the works of the colonizers as well as the colonized ones. (Ahmed, 2014)

1.1 An Introduction to Bhabha' Concept of Hybridity, Mimicry and Ambivalence

Peter Barry states: "Hybridity is a condition in which people and groups belong to more than one culture at the same time, such as the colonizer's via a colonial education system and the colonized through local and oral traditions" (Barry 2002). It's often a blend of colonised experience and colonial influences like schooling. Ethnicity, language, and culture are also included. It provides a liminal area between overlapping cultures, the ambiguous third space of "translation and negotiation's cutting edge." (Bhabha).

Hybridity is an essential idea in postcolonial theory because it redefines the notion of culture, which was previously assumed to be rigid and immutable. The history of the term "hybridity" is both extensive and eventful. However, in contemporary postcolonial philosophy, it is often used as a reference to the concept of a "Third Space." (Bhabha 1994, p.53). Despite what Western ideology may suggest, cultural differences are neither unchangeable, rigid, nor primitive. When Eurocentric dominance structures are challenged and reinvented, cultural hybridity emerges.

The term is associated with Bhabha's analysis of the relation between the colonizers and the colonized. According to him cultural identities are formed in the contradictory and ambivalent space that exist between them. He calls that place the "third space of enunciation". Bhabha argues

that acknowledging this contradictory space mitigates the perceived 'strangeness' of cultural diversity (53) in relation to the recognition of the hybridity which is the place where cultural differences work. (Dizayi, 2016).

Ambivalence is defined as the "presence of mutually opposing sentiments or attitudes" in its most fundamental meaning (Quayum and Talif 1997). A person with ambivalence is someone who has contradictory feelings and opinions. This notion will be used to analyse the poetry and to look for mixed emotions.

Mimicry is when someone attempts to imitate someone else in some fashion, with hilarious results: "a topic of a difference that is nearly the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). It is seen as a process rather than a basic, permanent, and unchanging identity. The coloniser has no absolute pre-existing identity that can be copied, and the colonised has no actual identity that is being betrayed via imitation. The structure of imitation, according to Bhabha, originates from a basic yet unstable drive on the side of the colonial power. Another effect of imitation is the eroding of the colonizer's ostensibly secure original identity. The colonizer's identity is continuously eroding, thanks to the impacts of literature, humour, clever politeness, and repetition. To summarise, mimicry occurs when someone attempts to imitate another person in some fashion, and it indirectly provides a chance for agency, if not a model for agency.

Setyowati (2010) explores mimicry as characteristically visual. He refers to Bhabha that he emphasizes the visual as the most important aspect of imitation, emphasizing the stereotype links. He claims that the mimicry's visibility is always created at the place of prohibition. Mimicry is an ambiguous phenomena in and of itself. (Setyowati, 2010)

In postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity is used to understand the dynamics of identity formation globally. Bhabha's work posits that cultural dynamics change, giving rise to a third space. This theory has been invaluable in analyzing literary works that explore the experiences, biculturalism, and difficulties of belonging across multiple cultures and traditions.

Bhabha's framework has been largely used by many researchers in their work, which studies postcolonial identities, and a vast group exists in systematic application to Moniza's poem "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan". This research aims to fill an important gap by closely studying Alvi's poem through the lens of Bhabha's cultural theory. The research suggests that the poem addresses a mixed cultural background and diasporic identity. It has not yet been thoroughly studied in the context of Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity.

This research paper aims to analyze Moniza Alvi's "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" to find out elements of cultural hybridity as proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. The basic premise guiding this study is the Bhabhian theory, which posits that no culture remains pure; instead, cultures are continuously in flux and undergo gradual transformations and adaptations. The poem, as this research will describe, depicts features of subjects living under colonial influence, where the self is constantly negotiated between an ancestral homeland and a new cultural environment. The nature of this study is qualitative, utilizing Catherine Belsey's rigorous method of textual analysis to deconstruct the poem's linguistic and thematic layers, thereby depicting the intricate manifestations of cultural hybridity inculcated within its verses.

Problem Statement

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity posits that cultures are constantly evolving and intermixing with one another in "third spaces." This theory is often employed in postcolonial studies to understand individuals who reside between two cultures. However, Moniza Alvi's poem "Presents from My Aunt in Pakistan" has not been studied much in this way. The poem reveals

the narrator's struggle to navigate between Pakistani and English cultures, highlighting how this cultural mix shapes identity. Examining the poem through Bhabha's theory can provide a deeper understanding of identity, cultural hybridity, and the rejection of pure or fixed cultures.

Research Questions

1. How does Moniza Alvi's poem "*Presents from my Aunt in Pakistan*" represent cultural hybridity?
2. What are the Postcolonial elements that fit the poem into Homi K Bhaba's cultural theory?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the theme of cultural hybridity in the poem
2. To find out how the colonizer's culture influences that of the colonized

Significance of the study

This study applies Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity to Moniza Alvi's poem *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan*, offering a fresh interpretation of identity, belonging, and cultural adaptation in diasporic contexts. It demonstrates the practical relevance of Bhabha's concepts, such as the third space and mimicry, showing how cultural hybridity operates within literature. The research enriches literary criticism while contributing to postcolonial studies by highlighting the evolving nature of cultural identities in a globalized world.

Rationale

Although the exploration of the bicultural identity and diasporic tensions in Moniza Alvi, *Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan* has been commonly studied, majority of literature, such as Thieme (2003) and Innes (2007) has analyzed the poem with a generic postcolonial viewpoint. This paper is among the first to explicitly view the approach the author uses to Alvi in engaging with hybridity as a Commonwealth diasporic practice which can be used to reflect how the UK changed its way of dealing with South Asian Commonwealth countries following the 1971 geopolitical realignments. The article has pointed out the way the poem by Alvi negotiates identity in trans-Commonwealth cultural and economic networks by applying the imagery in Alvi through the prism of Commonwealth-specific hybridity. This emphasis shifts off the abstract postcolonial theory to demonstrate how Alvi has made a special contribution to the Commonwealth literary studies.

Literature Review

Mostafae (2016) makes a remark on Bhabha's hypothesis, saying, "In 1949, Homi K. Bhabha came up with important words to describe how colonisers and colonised people interact. In a society where some cultures are dominant and thought to be better, more valuable, and stronger than other, less privileged and colonised cultures, simple ideas like imitation, hybridity, ambivalence, and third space help us untangle the complexities of how different cultures express their identities. When their homelands, traditions, and identities are taken from them by force, these ideas can be seen as techniques and tools that colonised people use to survive, change, and rebuild their shattered lives. For example, Bhabha's definition of "mimicry" is the way that people who have been colonised copy, imitate, and adopt the culture, lifestyle, language, ways of thinking, and ways of acting of the colonisers. On the other hand, mimicry is more than just copying the values of another culture. It's a complicated thing that has big effects on a person's cultural identity and sense of self".

Shirin Zubair (2012) study asserts that this subtly shaped worldview is orientated toward American culture and ideals. As a result, the deliberate adoption of Westernized cultural ideals, particularly by Pakistani elites, has created a cultural divide with extreme opposites within Pakistani culture.

This clearly demonstrates the intrinsic power of neo-colonialism in defining, moulding, and re-constructing people's self-images, both in Pakistan and in the diaspora.

Moniza Alvi poem "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" Has been studied a lot for how it shows bi culture identity and the emotional struggles of diaspora. However most researchers have not deeply used homi K. Bhabas ideas especially has concept of cultural Hybradity and the "Third space" As the primary analytical lens. Most studies focus on the conflict between cultures or how someone feels separated from their own highlighting "Loss" Instead of the positive change that can form mixing cultures.

“Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan” by Alvi is a well-known poem that shows the speaker’s struggle between her British and Pakistani identities. The clothes and gifts from Pakistan symbolise her cultural roots. They give her a sense of belonging but also make her feel different and distant. The poem reflects her mixed feelings of attraction and separation from her heritage. Critics such as John Thieme (2003) and Lyn Innes (2007) have noted how Alvi uses tangible cultural artefacts – the clothes and gifts – as symbolic representations of the speaker’s Pakistani roots, and how these objects create a sense of connection, yet also alienation, in her British context.

2. Postcolonialism and the Shifting Terrain of Identity

Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) displayed how the West constructed the "Orient" inferior. This binary opposition made a crisis of self for those caught in its gaze. Frantz Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks (1952), said the psychological loss created by colonialism, where colonized individuals made the colonizer's look, giving birth to alienation and a fragmented sense of self. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" (1988) highlighted the silencing of marginalized voices and the difficulty of showcasing those at the bottom of the colonial power structure. These foundational works underscore the pervasive theme of identity crisis and loss within postcolonial contexts. However, later scholars, particularly Homi K. Bhabha, moved beyond a purely binary understanding of colonial power, proposing a more dynamic and nuanced view of cultural encounters.

3. Homi K. Bhabha and the Theory of Cultural Hybridity

According to Bhabha (1994) Homi Bhabha is an important figure in modern theory and is known for his concept of culture, combination of "double" and "third space". Bhabha’s ideas challenge fixed or pure culture, arguing that cultures are always constantly being re-arranged through communication, translation, and borrowing.

Bhabha suggest that colonial imposition demands for transformation and assimilation. The colonized by mimicking the colonizer exposes instability of colonial norm (Bhaba 1994, p.38). It is third space that identity is not lost but reshaped becoming multi-layered. The theory of Bhaba is extensively used to study various works exploring diaspora and multiculturalism.

4. The Research Gap and Justification of Present Study

Moniza Alvi poem "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" Has been studied a lot for how it shows bi culture identity and the emotional struggles of diaspora. However most researchers have not deeply used Homi K. Bhaba’s ideas especially has concept of cultural Hybridity and the “Third space” As the primary analytical lens. Most studies focus on the conflict between cultures or how someone feels separated from their own highlighting "Loss" Instead of the positive change that can form mixing cultures.

This study tries to fill this serious gap. By analyzing the work of "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" by using Bhabha's framework, this research also illustrates how the conflicting cultural elements displayed in the poem (the Pakistani gifts vs. the British context) do not only result in a

simple "loss of identity," but create a fertile **"Third Space"** where a novel, hybrid identity is produced. The paper explores the specific "elements of cultural hybridity" present in the poem, displaying the both novel cultures.

Research Methodology

The nature of the study is qualitative. Patton and Cochran (2002) argue that qualitative research was introduced in the social sciences to analyse social and cultural processes. According to Mason (1996), qualitative research studies the structure of how the social environment is generated, experienced, or perceived. This strategy facilitates comprehension of varied, rich, and complicated material by decomposing it into its component parts. According to Khan (2018), "Qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and analyses non-numerical data with the goal of extracting meaning from the data in order to better understand social life via the study of individual people or places (Khan, 2018)."

The study starts with a thorough examination of the poetry in order to unearth their hidden meanings. Specific attention is paid to the poet's various lines, word choices, societal limits, and individual decisions. Diverse social tactics have been researched to see how they are internalized and spread to contribute to identity loss.

Theoretical framework

Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial studies on identity provided the theoretical foundation for this investigation. The concept of mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence by Homi Bhabha have been utilized to analyse the confused perception of a post colonially contaminated identity. Understanding this form of cultural hybridity will be aided by Bhabha's conceptions of third space and hybridity as theoretical tools. As previously stated, his concepts about hybridity, stereotypes, imitation, and ambivalence have had a significant impact on the subject of postcolonial investigation. "The purpose of colonial rhetoric is to portray the colonised as a population of defective kinds based on racial origin in order to legitimise conquering and to build administrative and educational institutions," he claims. (Bhabha, 1994, p.70)

Results/ Findings

Discussion and analysis

Homi K. Bhabha lived in different regions and different countries. He was born in India, studied in the United Kingdom, and taught in America, so the transitions in his life have deeply affected his psyche due to his attachment to different cultures, which is why he believes in hybridity. Hybridity is considered an essential and influential term that emerged after the great colonialism in the subcontinent. The term hybridity refers to the transcultural, which is a product of colonisation. Homi K. Bhabha says that hybridity is a more productive space, as it is a more productive mode for dealing with cultural issues. Purity, first of all, is a myth, but it can become deeply destructive. Hybridity is also more productive because it creates space for cultural differences, according to Homi K. Bhabha. Culture is not static; instead, it can change over time. The concept tells us that there is no pure and permanent culture. According to the theory, it is the cross-breeding of two things which can form a new creation called 'Third space'. According to Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity has many forms, including racial, linguistic, cultural, and political. He says among these things, no one is permanent; there are always possibilities of getting change in these very things.

*My costume clung to me and I was aflame,
I couldn't rise up out of its fire,
Half-English,
unlike Aunt Jamila.*

When the girl wears the gifted clothes she does not feel comfortable with them, they are teasing her, here in this point we see loss of identity because her traditional dresses do not attract her, she further says she is half-English and not familiar that of Eastern culture unlike Aunt Jamila, if Aunt Jamila wears then it is fine but not for a girl who lives in Western society.

Hybridity

Literary Hybridity

In the literature, the term hybridity is closely tied to the post-colonial discussion, which explores the blending of Eastern and Western cultures. The founders of the theory of hybridity include Homi Bhabha, Nestor García Cárdenas, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul Gilroy. Their contributions raised awareness among readers about multiculturalism in the early 1990s. In 1994, Homi K. Bhabha's work, *"The Location of Culture,"* played a vital role in highlighting hybridity and transculturalism. Homi K. Bhabha's arguments are essential in the discussion of hybridity. He discusses how one culture can be blended into another, as well as the concepts of ambivalence and mimicry. In the post-colonial era, these things have been highlighted by the critics and theorists a couple of times, because mimicry and hybridity were at their peak at that very particular time, when Western culture was becoming dominant over Eastern culture, and Eastern people followed their culture as a civilised culture, while hybridity was taking its place. Apart from that, the modernist approach to writing literary works, such as novels, short stories, and poetry, has now become a hallmark of the Western literary style. In the realm of literary hybridity, post-colonial authors have focused on modes of storytelling similar to those of Western authors. Salman Rushdie and African writer Ben Okri combined their cultural and traditional literary styles with the European literary form.

Linguistic Hybridity

Culture can be defined in many ways, but in simple terms, we can define it as the expression of art, design, and language, as well as dress, fashion, music, dance, and so on. Hybridity in culture is rapidly increasing and spreading these days. It is the result of colonialism, the culture of the colonisers impact on the minds of Asian and African people; they gradually adopted the Western culture, and the purity of their own culture started to decline. The same thing happened to Homi K. Bhabha, who demonstrates through his writing that no culture is pure; every culture can emerge about another culture, so this is the reality of existing humans, who cannot live in a static position. Today's world, the British' culture has been adopted throughout the globe.

The elements of hybridity, the speaker is given gifts in Pakistan, where she was born, where she is gifted with salwar kameez, shoes and some other presents which appear to her very attractive, the salwar kameez appears to her like glistening like an open orange split. Upon getting the gifts, the speaker discovers that the fashion has been evolving both in the West and the East. The speaker is torn between two cultures; on the one hand, she is longing to her native land, Pakistan. But conversely she must live up to the culture of England where she now lives and gets caught in between the two divergent cultures. These sentiments are hybrid since she does not subscribe to a single culture and holds the belief in hybridity. The salwar kameez in this case is a Commonwealth material signifier, the presence of the garment in a UK household is an index of the movement of cultural commodities in Commonwealth channels. The speaker is in love with the Pakistani culture

and is complimenting the salwar kameez; he is using figurative language to explain them. She appears extremely pleased with the presents and is attracted to the traditional Pakistani dresses.

*But often I admired the mirror-work,
tried to glimpse myself*

In the miniature

But in the same time she feels awkward with the Pakistani dresses because such dresses are not been use in England so her identity is been challenged over in this situation, she thinks that if I wear these salwarkameez I will be looked like abird entrapped in a grate, so over here the researcher found the element of hybridity because the speaker is adopting two different cultures neither she is true follower of Pakistani culture nor England, because she lives for away from her birth place and settled in the other country where the culture is completely different

There are some lines which show us the hybridity, the teenage girl says that;

I tried each satin-silken top was alien in the sitting-room.

I could never be as lovely as those clothes-

Now the girl is sitting in a room, feels alienated because the clothes are not impressed her school friends. However, they are valuable for the girl, but not for others. She says that if I wear these clothes, then I will never be looked at as lovely as I am in my traditional Pakistani dress, so she is not ready to wear it.

Conclusion

Having analysed the poem, the Present from my Aunt in Pakistan, through the lens of cultural hybridity, the researcher has found the elements of the same, which demonstrate how culture can be passed on to another culture. The author is caught in the middle between two entirely distinct cultures. She misses her old culture, the Pakistani culture yet on the other hand, her mind changed and she has been following the culture of England in which she has been living since childhood. Homi k Bhabha cultural hybridity theory justification is justified in this poem, he is a believer in trans culture that culture is not pure at all, it can be changed, we can see in the poem that Moniza Alvi has really described the mindset of a girl who lives in abroad and how she thinks about culture being out of her own country.

The gifts which she receives from her aunt in Pakistan seem beautiful to her; they remind her old culture of Pakistan and for a while she felt like that she is in Pakistan, her transmissions of mind justify the theory of Homi k Bhabha hybridity, that the mind of man is not static it can changed with time, so in the same way cultural is a matter of change there is no purity in it. In the post-colonial era, Western culture has had a significant influence on Eastern culture. If it were a matter of purity, then it would not have emerged with Western culture.

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Author Bio

Zubair Ahmad is a scholar of Commonwealth literature and postcolonial studies whose work is primarily concerned with the issues of cultural hybridity, diaspora and identity formation. His work examines how authors of South Asian heritage and beyond the Commonwealth at large address the issues of cultural dislocation, belonging and transnational connections in their poetry and prose. Based on the works of theorists like Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall, Zubair explores the role of literary works in shedding light on the processes of migration, hybridity, and cultural negotiation of cross-border processes. His other academic interests are comparative postcolonial literatures, diasporic women writing and modern discussion of the Commonwealth identity.

