ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

MIRRORING THE FADING INDO-ISLAMIC SAGA IN AHMAD ALI'S *TWILIGHT IN DELHI*

Syed Hanif Rasool
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak
***Kifayatullah**
Department of English Language and Literature, University of Chitral
Ahmed Jalal
Lecturer, Department of English, Edwardes College, Peshawar
*Corresponding author kifayat@uoch.edu.pk

Abstract

The subcontinent English novel written during colonial India broadly addresses the issues of culture, politics, religion, and race. In response to the rising question of the subcontinent's Muslim community during the 1940s, Ahmad Ali's Twilight in Delhi explores the diminishing Muslim civilization in India, locating Delhi as the center of the collective Muslim consciousness in India. This article investigates how Twilight has posited the glory of the Muslim ways of life by showing glimpses of the eclectic Muslim society through Sufi Islam, arguing further how the Delhiwallah's nostalgia for the glorious Muslim Past in India has turned into a solid religious and cultural resistance against the British Imperialism.

Keywords: Muslim civilization in India, Ahmad Ali, Twilight in Delhi, Sufi Islam, eclectic Muslim society

Introduction

Muslims have left indelible marks on India's culture and civilization. The process of cultural reconciliation and amalgamation started during the medieval period of Indian history with the establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi (Turks and Afghans), reaching its zenith during the Mughal era. The long history of both the Muslim rulers, saints, scholars, artists and common folks have contributed substantively in shaping the eclectic Ganga-Jamuni culture of India. This unique mosaic of culture owes greatly to the influence of Arab, Persian, Turk, Afghan and Central Asian values blended with the Vedic and Buddhist cultures. This unification consequently gave birth to new models of taste in art, literature, language and society, transforming the Muslim and influencing the people of the religious communities in India. Azad maintains that India has generously opened her treasures to the Muslims who in turn have given her what she needed the most: democratic norms and equality (101). Islam has given India a unique cultural and political unity. It is predominantly the religious thoughts, political system, and Muslim Sufism that have changed the ancient Indian culture into a vibrant Indo-Muslim culture. The qualitative effect of this process is reflected in unity and continuity of the ancient social and cultural life. Kabir refers to this unification as 'Medieval Reconciliation,' elaborating that the Indian culture is the result of a unique process of continuity, synthesis and enrichment. In the early periods of Indian history, the reconciliation of many opposite strands seem slow, but with the advent of Islam in India the process is intensified to a great deal. It is contended that the

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

conflicts during medieval India, however, are due to the struggles for political power and supremacy, whereas we hardly find any trace of conflicts based entirely on religion (37-65).

The splendid Muslim culture is epitomized in Delhi, a city spreading over the immense expanse of the subcontinent. It appears as the capital of an empire whose demographic composition poses challenges and offers opportunities on a global scale, thereby becoming the nucleus of the Medieval India, featuring the cosmopolitan traits, tastes and manners. Eventually, Delhi, like a civilized human being, wears a civilized and cultured temperament. Politeness, tolerance, mannerism, courtesy, sociability, and amiability prevail among its diverse populace, and it wins the fame of the jewel of the medieval India. The very name stands as a metaphor for the eclectic cultural center of the Muslim of South Asia, surpassing the fames of Baghdad, Cairo, Samarqand and Bukhara, and lovingly distinguishes as" Hazrat e Dehli," meaning "Delhi the Noble" (Zameer 9-10). Ibn-e-Battuta, a great Arab scholar and traveler of the fourteenth century, remembers Delhi as "a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength…surrounded by a wall that has no equal in the world, and is the largest city in India, nay rather the largest city in the entire Muslim Orient" (Singh 10). The wealth and culture of Delhi was at its zenith during the Shah Jahan era, "probably the wealthiest man in the world of his time". He erected a new city at Delhi; 'Shahjahanabad' that took nine years to complete and cost 6.5 million rupees (Singh 26). Samsam-ud-Daula, the eighteenth century historian in The Building of Shahjehanabad quoted that one of Amir Khusro's prophetic sayings that he long ago had composed in praise of Delhi, was fulfilled: "Verily if there is a Paradise on earth, / it is this, it is this, it is this" (Singh 29).

During the Mughals' 'twilight' in Delhi, the city had turned into a passage to tragic events one after the other. Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah on one hand and Marahattas and Jaats on the other hand ruined Delhi' grandeur. Meer Taqi Meer, the great Urdu poet recalls the fall of Delhi: "There once was a fair city, among cities of the world the first in fame; it hath been ruined and laid desolate, to that city I belong, [and] Delhi is its name" (Singh 56). After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the Muslim rule in India disrupted and finally ended in 1857. Of all other cities of Mughal India, Delhi, then a symbolic center of the Indo-Persian Muslim culture and power, experienced worst of the English animosity. Ghalib, the great Urdu poet of Delhi, has witnessed the fall of Delhi, observing the English overrunning the city in all directions killing whoever they found in the streets, watching every road of the city a battlefield where the British slaughtered the helpless and burnt their houses, taking every territory by force of arms. Lamenting at the pains, sufferings, and agonies of the people of Delhi, Ali recounts the miserable plights of Delhi Muslim.

> At the naked spectacle of this vengeful wrath and malevolent hatred, the colour fled from men's faces, and a vast concourse of men and women, . . took to flight through the gates [of the city] . . .My lamenting pen, while the tears fall from my eyelashes to mingle with the word of blood I write' (57-58).

Thus, the Mughal Delhi was wiped out while its culture lay out beyond the confines of the ancient walled city and New Delhi of the British Raj with its wide boulevards and European army uniforms, symbolic of a new order, was replacing the old.

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

Delhi's dominant Muslim character began to transform after the War of 1857. Defeat of the last Mughal ruler at the hands of the British precipitated the process of change. This British impact was alien to a great extent. The Mughals had established balance, stability, unity and order in almost every walk of life. During their rule the social and cultural aspects of Muslim civilization dominated in the prevailing society. The introduction of this new element was a threat to the established Muslim culture. The British impact was very different from all other previous cultural interactions. The British deliberately alienated themselves from the native Indians and clung to their own European lifestyle. Consequently, the Indians as a nation could not reconcile themselves with the British way of life for quite long after the 1857. This absence of relation was itself a kind of relation (Kabir 78-86).

The West burst in with its growing capitalism and the development of a complex social consciousness. Thus far-reaching changes in Indian modes of life were inevitable. Many of these changes could be called as threats and challenges to the established social and cultural values of Muslim society in India. The social, economic, political and cultural institutions and values of the medieval Muslim society were crumbling. "India was literally in a melting pot". Everything from the material conditions of life to the buttresses of tradition and faith was fading away. The loss of Delhi was irreversible. Delhi had been devastated many a time but none of those earlier looting and plundering was as deadly as the present one. The wound inflicted this time went deep down to the soul of the city and its scars would be visible for a long time to come. The face of the city would bleed for long (Kabir 78-86).

The conflict between the gaiety of the past and the gloom in the post 1857 India has been one of the most dominant themes in various works of Indian literature since the start of the 20th century. Thus we see a growing emphasis on depiction of the social, cultural, religious, economic, and political aspects of life. This tendency made literature a sort of social criticism. As a result, a quick transition started from the earlier dominant romantic traits (inherited from the Arabic, Persian and Turk traditions) to social realism and progressiveness in literature of the subcontinent.

Literature Review

Born in Kocha Pandat in Delhi in 1910, Ahmad Ali belonged to an orthodox religious family of Syeds, whose family tree traces back to Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166) of Baghdad. The family came to India in the rule of King Akbar, establishing as the Delhi nobles, and later on during the 1857 massacre suffered like the other noble families of Delhi, losing their land in the riots. After the War of Independence, the family joined service and his father became an extra assistant commissioner, posted to various cities in India (Kamran 15-17). After completing his early schooling at Azamgarh in UP, Ali went to Aligarh in 1923 and continued his education at Aligarh Muslim University. At the university, Prof. Eric C. Dickinson saw the literary spark in him and encouraged his creative literary potentials. It was also over there that he was introduced to Raja Rao, who became a famous English writer at some later stage. In 1926, he wrote his first English poem, 'The Lake of Dreams' which was published in *Aligarh*

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

Magazine. In 1927, he joined Lakhnow University to study English literature. There he was open to the new ideas and the current literary and intellectual thoughts. He also met and befriended Laurence Brander, a lecturer in English at Canning College Lakhnow. In 1929, Ali's first English short story, 'When the Funeral Was Crossing the Bridge' was published in the Journal of Lakhnow University. It was in 1931 that Ali got his Masters in English Literature. Soon he started teaching English literature; first, at Lakhnow University (1931-32), then, at Agra College (1933-34), after that, at Allah Abad University (1934-36), and again at Lakhnow University (1936-41).

The period between 1931 and 1941 was most remarkable in his literary career. All such important literary events like; the publication of *Angaare* (Burning Coals; 1932), the organisation of All India Progressive Writers' Movement, the quitting of Ali from the Movement, and the publication of his most remarkable literary work, *Twilight in Delhi*, had occurred during this time (Kamran 17-20). During the same period Sajjad Zaheer had shortly returned from England and was living in Lakhnow where he met Ali. Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmuduzzafar (1908-1954) and Ali Published *Angaare*. Two of Ali's short stories were included in this bold anthology of ten Urdu short stories. Most of the stories in this anthology were lacking in sobriety and patience. They were against the prevailing conservativeness. In certain places, the stories were sensual and they depicted explicit influences of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence (Zaheer 30).

In *Angaare,* Ali's stories were more prominent because of their picturesque and realistic depiction of the bitter facts of life in the most artistic manner. In his initial stories, Ali depicted the middle class Delhi women and their problems most realistically. He was particularly interested in Delhi's life and people. It was this initial impact of Delhi on Ali's writing that can be seen in his latter works (Alvi 66 -67). *Angaare* was followed by *Shoole* (Flames; 1933). These short stories were the live pictures of the surroundings, streets, houses, inhabitants, beggars, hawkers, wanderers and such others. Ali observed every movement of the characters and was their confidant. He made his characters immortal. He revolutionized the form, style, and contents of the then short story. His stories were innovative because he introduced the modern psychological trends, and new economic currents and issues to this genre in the subcontinent. All this was truly progressive and it transformed the whole domain of fiction to a great extent. His fiction is the depiction of the ordinary characters mostly familiar, but we have overlooked them and their idiosyncrasies. Ali made us aware of them and that is the very essence of his art (Alvi 66-67).

In 1936, he wrote stories like 'Our Lane' and 'Mr. Shams-ul-Hasan', but there onwards he gradually parted with the mainstream progressive writers who had tilted to somewhat Marxist trends. In 1938, he formally announced his dissociation with the Progressive Writers Association (Kamran 34), refusing to accept the views of his other Marxist friends like Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmuduzzafar that only (the stories which are written about) the proletariat and peasantry are progressive, emphasizing that his approach to life, to society, is through the creative work, not vice-versa' (Rehman32). Thus, Ali broke away from the Marxists and continued writing

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

following his own brand of progressive approach to life and society. After pioneering modern Urdu short story, and writing some remarkable English short stories, Ali's creative genius called for a wider and bigger canvas and he started writing novels. Referring to this shift, Ali writes in an autobiographical article 'Baqalam e Khud' (Urdu) published in Jamia:

> One can, but to a very limited extent depict the conditions of life and the changing face of history in the short story. . .As if the short story is a segment, and remains a segment despite its meaningfulness, of a greater body. I was in search of a vast and bigger canvas and therefore I chose novel. You will see that in [Twilight in Delhi] that there is history, civilization, the ups and downs of life, the bloom and gloom of life (179).

In 1940, he appeared with his novel *Twilight in Delhi* (henceforth called *Twilight*), taking the novel to the famous Hogarth Press in London, and the editorial staff of the Press considered some parts of the novel subversive, but they published it. Attracting the immediate favor of E. M. Forster, Edwin Muir, Bonamy Dobree, Morris Collins, and several others British writers, Twilight received great applause and was published several times and also translated into Urdu and several other European languages (Kamran 41).

By and large, *Twilight* kept influencing Ali's later literary pursuits. His short stories worked as the apprenticeship to Twilight. In the years that followed he brought two other anthologies of Urdu short stories; Hamari Gali (Our Lane; 1942) and Quaid Khana (The Prison House; 1944). Some of the short stories from these books were translated into English by Ali himself. They came with the title The Prison House (1958). Coppolo (1977) considers these stories 'autobiographical' and 'progressive' (Rehman 29-38).

Analysis

Set in the great center of the Muslim Civilization, Delhi, *Twilight in Delhi* is Ahmad Ali's brilliant and vivid picture of the life and conditions of the pre-partition Delhi. It is a nostalgic tale of a middle-class Muslim family in wake of encroaching British colonialism in the early 20th century. It is a lament on the fading of a particular mode of thought and living as the writer himself refers to it. Vividly and realistically, the novel reflects the multiple facets of the Muslim culture in Delhi. Delhi-born Ahmad Ali was rightly familiar to Delhi s sensibilities. His portrayal of the transforming Muslim middle-class 'Delhiwallah' is realistic and authentic. Further, he is bold and innovative in his depiction and representation of a particular outlook of Delhi and Delhiwallahs. The novel begins with a most realistic but poetic depiction of the city of Delhi and its people on a typical summer night

> Night envelops the city, covering it like a blanket. In the dim starlight roofs and houses and by-lanes lie asleep, wrapped in a restless slumber, breathing heavily as the heat becomes oppressive or shoots through the body like pain. In the courtyards, on the roofs, in the by-lanes, on the roads, men sleep on bare beds, half naked, tired after the sore day's labor. A few still walk on the otherwise deserted roads, hand in hand, talking; and some have jasmine garlands in their hands. The smell from the flowers escapes, scents a few yards of air around them and dies smothered by the heat. Dogs go about sniffing the gutters in search of offal; and cats slink out of the narrow by-lanes, from under the planks jutting out of shops, and lick the earthen cups out from which men had drunk milk and thrown away. (Ali 1)

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

With the realistic characters, the setting, and the plot, *Twilight* is 'a historical document', examining the Muslim civilization in Delhi, narrating the history of British colonialism in India, challenging the existing canon of imperial literature by providing a Muslim view of the colonial encounter, and depicting the 'nostalgia for the past glory of Mughal India in an elegy for an older Islamic order" (Ahmad 15).

Culture is the national character of a community. It is a complete way of life encompassing religion, creed, knowledge, social conduct, and rites of a particular community. A community's culture is influenced by both internal and external factors. The internal factors are its geography and history. Muslim civilization in the subcontinent owes a lot to the external factors. After the arrival of Muslims in the Sub-continent, the local geography and culture had their impact on them. With the passage of time these Muslims were frequently influenced by the Arabs, Persian, Turks, and Afghan factors. Later on, with the arrival of the Western, the Muslim society started transforming and *Twilight in Delhi* is a realistic depiction of this transformation. Ali placed a mirror to the city of Delhi and her people and observed the fading Indo- Muslim outlook of the city, her withering culture, its crumbling walls, her waning eccentricities and idiosyncrasies. Maurice Collins (1889-1973) considers Ali "the vanguard of the literary movement" that should make us understand India (Kamran 62).

Besides this observation, the novel depicts the impacts of the nostalgia for the by-gone grandeur and splendor of Delhi and the growing reaction of Delhi against the British rule in India. The broad argument of the study starts with the point that how the novel realistically portrays the city and the people of Delhi. Highlighting Islam's impact on India as one of the most remarkable events in her history, Abul Kalam Azad argues:

> . . . we brought with us a great treasure and this land was also overladen with its own untold wealth. We entrusted our wealth to this country; and India opened the floodgates of its treasures to us. We gave to this country the most precious of our possessions and one which was greatly needed by it. We gave to it the message of democracy and equality' (qtd in Fyzee 113).

Ali narrates the twilight of a Muslim way of life that overwhelms Delhi even after 1857. The waning facets of the Muslim way of life represent a complete order in itself. But the British intrusion brought a chaos in this order. However, Twilight has splendidly displayed some cultural remains of the fading Muslim society after 1857. Both through the household of a Delhi noble Mir Nihal and in its wake the entire Muslim society are depicted realistically in the novel. The novel shows people speaking Urdu in the Delhvi dialect. In fact, Urdu is the product of one of the most remarkably inherited treasures of the grand Muslim legacy in India. Delhi used to be its one of the nuclei besides Lakhnow and Haiderabad. Tariq Rehman elaborated this aspect of the novel better than any other European or American critics of Ahmad Ali.

> Besides the use of events to evoke the life of Muslim middle class Delhi, Ali has also presented that life in three other ways: by reproducing the nearest equivalent of their linguistic idiom in English; by describing their ethos through the behavior and attitude of minor characters; by narratorial comments (40).

Invariably in the novel, Ali gives the exact translation of the idiomatic Urdu phrases. Also he includes the English translation of certain very appropriate verses of Persian and Urdu. It

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

is mainly through the female characters of the novel that Ali uses this technique most naturally: For instance, Ali, pointing to the pugnacious behavior of Begum Jamal (Mir Nihal's dead brother's wife) uses the expressions 'breasts were beaten, and heaven and earth made one', and elsewhere, 'five fingers in ghee", "a fairy from Caucasus' (qtd in Rehman 40), and when Asghar relates the news of brother-in-law's death to his sister, he recalls that unfortunate day when that telegram arrives; 'when I read it the earth seemed to slip from under my feet' (Ali 48). Further, when Begum Waheed and Begum Nihal are arguing on the issue of Asghar's marriage, what Begum Nihal says is the exact translation of Urdu idiom; 'Has the boy gone mad? If your father only comes to hear of this, he will eat him [Asghar] up alive' (Ali 60). And on another occasion when Asghar visits Mushtari Bai, a cultured dancing girl of Delhi, she receives him warmly and says; 'You have become the moon of Eid. The eyes long for a sight of your face, but in vain'. Now this is a plain rendering of an Urdu idiom into English (Ali 75). There are several others occasions in the novel where Ali puts the direct literal translations of Urdu idioms and phrases. "Ali's use of these words and idioms give a foreign touch to the language of the novel which adds to the quality of its realism" (Rehman 41).

Similarly, here and there in the novel Ali writes beautiful poetic prose that shows his skills of translating the literary imagery of Delhi poets. The popularity of Urdu and Persian poetry and the use of poetic language in routine conversations are usual features of the Muslim society of Delhi. For instance, when Bari (a friend of Asghar) asks him of his love, Asghar says.

> She is beautiful, Bari, very beautiful . . . 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. Her eyes are like narcissi, big and beautiful. There is nectar in their whites and poison in their blacks. Her eyebrows like two arched bows ready to wound the hearts of men with the arrows of their lashes. Her lips are redder than the blood of lovers, and her teeth look like pearls studded in a row. . . (Ali 32).

As the narrative moves ahead, Ali very skillfully adds the translation of Urdu and Persian verses into English. This testifies the popularity of poetry particularly among the Muslim populace of Delhi beside music and other forms of fine arts. These quotations are numerous and are apt to the situation in the narrative. In the post 1857 Delhi the tradition of poetry recitation was alive and it was one of the most liked forms of entertainment among both the young and old.

Like poetry, *qawwali* is also another typical feature of the life of Muslim Delhi. Such gatherings are common at night or at any time of the day in case of some celebration or social events. The *qawwals* sing loudly "in a chorus mystical love poems which could be taken as addressed to God or Muhammad or some earthly sweetheart". The repetition is the very essence of *qawwali*. The leader of the chorus sings a line at the top of his voice and the others repeat "the same line over and over again". They sing in chorus and "a man in frenzy" raises repeated cries of 'Haq Allah, Haq'. The qawaal changes the line after some repetition: "Cares and miseries, grief and sorrow . . . / what is there I have not known in love" and with every subsequent note "the shouts of 'Haq' become more piercing and poignant, coming in quick succession," and the *qawwals* repeat the first line. Their performance seems a complete ceremony in itself. Ali captures a realistic picture of this important feature of Delhi's social life.

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

> They sat in a row and behind their backs were fat bolster cushions. In front of them sat the leader of the chorus on a carpet. In the light of lamps and lanterns the white clothes of the listeners looked eerie; and their shadows came and played on the wall of Mir Nihal's house. A young man was beating his hands on the floor in frenzy. He would rise on his knees and throw himself on the ground with all his force, shouting frantically 'hai, hai' all the time (Ali 44-49).

The fact that Ahmad Ali based his fiction in the social reality mostly that of the middle class Muslim society of Delhi is highlighted in various forms; presenting of the religious environ prevailing in the then Delhi, showing the people observing such rites and rituals such as performing ablutions, saying azaan, offering prayers, giving alms and *khairat* are realistically fascinating. Observing prayer is the most important religious obligation among the Muslims. Twilight depicts a moment from the daily life of the Muslims of Delhi near Jama Masjid.

> Just then the moazzin began to call the evening azaan; and one by one people began to go inside the mosque to offer prayers. They all crowded in front of the gate. They took off their shoes, took them in their hands and bending low walked in through the small postern. In a few moments the Chowk was empty and deserted while the faithful said their prayers and remembered their God (Ali 106-107).

For instance, the celebration of *meelad* is one such occasion that shows an obvious religious out-looks of the post-1857 Muslim society of Delhi. The novel brings the account of a meelad read by the family of Mir Nihal as thanksgiving for the success of Asghar's marriage with Bilqeece.

> The house was swept and a white sheet was spread over the wooden couches, sweets were sent for from the bazaar, and soon after the evening prayers two big lamps were lighted and kept on either side of a small carpet which has been spread on the couches with a bolster cushion at the back. Incense and Myrrh were burnt and kept on stands. Rose water was kept in long flasks, and fresh jasmine flower were laid on a platter. The scented smoke rose and mingled with the aroma of the flowers and filled the house with its sacred smell and imbued hearts with religious awe as the whole family sat waiting for Asghar to begin reading the *meelad* (Ali 82).

After Asghar has recited from the Holy Koran, he begins the episodes from the life of the Prophet (SA). He punctuates his talk with the phrase: 'Glory be to the Prophet and his descendants.' Asghar speaks with full emotions and makes the listeners cry. After this everybody stands and sings in chorus. He closes his eyes and sings, "swaying his body to and fro". His heart is "filled with the glory of God and the fervor of Islam". The listeners are standing with head down, drinking words through their ears". As they hear the word 'Muhammad', they fold their thumb and kiss them, and then they touch their eyes. After the proper wording of the *meelad*, Asghar sings a hymn in which he asks the Prophet to help him in his need.

O savior, come to my aid,
I am helpless in defeat.
O savior of men and faith,
come in my need to me. (Ali 82- 83)

The ending of the sitting is most realistic. Ali has captured a real situation of a typical meelad reading by the Delhi Muslims:

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

> As the voice of Nisar Ahmad rose and fell, spreading far and wide, they all sat silent listening until his voice gradually died away into the night out of which it was born. Then they raised their hands in prayer, and stood up blowing their breaths, made holy by repeating the names of God, inside their shirts. The sweets were distributed (Ali 83).

The Muslims of Delhi are also concerned about their apparent out-looks. Besides, describing the religious events, ceremonies, and rituals, Ali shows us typically traditional get up in which a majority of the elderly Muslims appear. Ali captures their typical ways, manners, and countenances most creatively and realistically. For instance, Mir Nihal, while coming to his home, meets Nisar Ahmad:

> He [Mir Nihal] saw Nisar Ahmad hurrying to the mosque. . .. He wore a shirt and pajama of home-spun, a cane cap brownish in colour and dirty at the edges, and a bandana over his shoulder. His head close-cropped and made his forehead look broad. His expansive fan-shaped beard was dyed red with henna, and his moustaches were shaved on the upper lip in accordance with Islamic laws. His nose was big, jutting out on his face like a rock, and a callosity had formed on his forehead on account of constantly rubbing it on the ground at prayer, and ashy grey from a distance on his dark face (Ali 92).

People call Nisar Ahmad, 'the Bilal Habshi' (after the name of the favourite companion of the Prophet from Africa), because he shares two things with Bilal Habshi; one his dark complexion, the other his golden voice. They like him and believe that "he would go straight to heaven for calling the faithful to prayer" (Ali 92).

Since the emergence of Islam in India, the mystics and spiritual divines have been venerated and loved, perhaps due to their tolerant and amiable behaviour towards the people of other faiths. These divines have been constant source of inspiration for both the Muslims and the people of the other religions in India. Besides its political importance, Delhi has also won the noble reputation of possessing a score of the tombs of Muslim saints here and there in the city, especially the tombs of Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Awlia, Hazrat Qutub-ud –Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Hazrat Khwaja Baqi Billah, and Hazrat Shah Wali-Ullah. The description of the Delhi faqir in the novel suggests the continuation of the tradition of mysticism that has been a special feature of Islam in India. Ali writes:

> From behind came a Mast Qalandar, a mad faqir, almost naked but for a strip of cloth tied to a string round his waist. . .. His matted beard, full of dust and soup and dirt, was tousled, looking like a bulbul's nest . . . from his bushy face his small eyes sparkled. . .. There was a look of madness on his face, yet people considered him a divine, a faqir very high up in the mystical order, as the name given to him, Qalandar, signified. He was favourite with the gamblers who always consulted him for lucky numbers. Most of the time he sat near the tomb of Haray Bharay (the evergreen one) and Sarmad at the foot of Jama Masjid, and seldom came into the city. He constantly cried the same mysterious saying: 'When there is such pleasure in throwing it out how great would be the bliss in keeping it (Ali 95-96).

It is at this point that Mir Nihal, preoccupied with the thoughts of his beloved Babban Jan, recalls "a Rubai of Sarmad, the mystic faqir and Persian poet who was beheaded by Aurungzeb:

> I've lost religion in quite a novel way,
> throwing faith for drunken eyes away:

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

> And all my life in piety spent I've flung
> at the altar for that idol- worshipper's joy. . . (Ali 96)

The Muslims in India have not only established their own religious outlook, but they have also developed a unique pattern of their life which has been mostly influenced by Islamic teachings and the practice of the mystic divines. These aspects are manifest from their ways, etiquettes, manners, thinking and imagination. The fact that the Delhi Muslims remember the dates of the important events of their lives with reference to the religious rituals shows the overwhelming status of religion. For instance, Begum Waheed talks to her mother about Asghar's marriage; "you know mother, Asghar will be twenty-three in the month of Eid. You should now get him married" (Ali 56).

Besides the original religious obligations and performances, the novel highlights various superstations that prevailed in the Muslim society of Delhi. For instance, while describing Ghafoor, a family servant of Mir Nihal, Ali draws a realistic sketch of a carefree youth:

> He was somewhere in his thirties with a black beard, oval in shape, with the hair on the cheekbones shaved off. He put a good deal of oil in his hair which was bobbed and it trickled down to his forehead. There was kohl in his eyes and a charm hung round his neck by a string. He had just started smoking his hookah, and on its smoking-stick sat a parrot, part of its wings and back all yellow because of the attar which Ghafoor rubbed on its feathers (Ali 37).

The novel's depiction of the superstitions among the Muslims of Delhi is based on reality. For instance, the novel brings an account of Asghar's friend Hameed that shows both the prevailing superstitions and the social conditions of the religious segment of the then Delhi's Muslim society:

Hameed and Asghar had played together and studied in the same maktab in childhood. He was a simple boy, well behaved and gentle. He was not only the first to memorise the portion of the Koran which he was asked to remember by heart in one day, but he also washed the Molvi Saheb's dishes swept the house and ran errands for him. When he was about eighteen years of age and there was talk of his marriage he suddenly went mad. He was a handsome boy and people began to say that some fairy or jinn had fallen in love with him. Others said that it was some evil spirit which had possessed him. They called all sorts of Molvis to treat him for these supernatural ailments and took him from one tomb of a saint to another, but to no purpose. Now someone had suggested that qawaalis could cure him. But instead of soothing his overwrought brain they tortured him the more (Ali 52).

By and large, the superstitious beliefs are more common among the women folk than the men in Delhi. For instance, when Begum Nihal gets angry at Asghar's marrying Bilqeese, she says, "That Begum Shabaz has cast some spell on my boy. I was fearing it all the time . . . He used to go to her house every day, and she has done something to him. Or she has given him some charm through Begum Jamal" (Ali 60-61).

On another occasion when a storm burst Begum Jamal shouted," For God's sake, put a broom under the leg of a bed". When Majeed asks the reason, his aunt replies;

> Because, our elders say, if you put a broom under the leg of a bed the wind-storm abates . . . You know . . . when a dust-storm blows it means the jinns are going to celebrate a

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

> marriage. . . They are creatures of God like us. . . There are some evil spirits among them. But most of them are Mussalmans like us, and some are holy (Ali 63-65).

The meticulously depicted family life of the Delhi Muslims in Twilight brings some very interesting details; for instance, when a male member of the family enters his own house, he "clears his throat in the vestibule" and a woman, who may be his wife, or a daughter, or a sister, or any other close relation, if lying on the bed sits up and "covers her head with her head-cloth" (Ali 7). The family relations and the social ties among the Indian Muslims are vast, abundant, and strong. But the family gatherings and social events, at the time of birth, marriage, and death, are conducted separately for the males and the females and due to the traditional pardah system the youth cannot mingle freely. However, the circle of family relation is extended and varied as compare to other societies. For instance, "in India cousins' wives, even distant cousins', are called sister-in-law, as the children of the parents' cousins are considered cousins and near relation" (Ali 25).

The novel depicts Asghar's love-at-first-sight upon his catching a glimpse of Bilqueese while he has gone see his sister-in-law. The staircase was just in front of him. Perhaps Bilqueese did not know that he was sitting there, for she came down into the courtyard. It was not until she stood face to face with him and their eyes met that she became aware of his presence. Seeing him she rushed inside. He sat there wonder-struck, overpowered with her beauty. Sometimes a fleeting glance goes more deeply home than a meeting. For Asghar this glance meant the entire world (Ali 33).

From the above quoted lines it is revealed that even among the family relations free interaction between the males and females is not encouraged by the Delhi Muslim society.

The novel brings another very important aspect of the then Delhi by showing the apparent distance between a father and a son. Mir Nihal 's austere behaviour as a traditional father in Delhi Muslim society who neither approves of his son's marriage by choice nor his marrying out of the family is very real. In fact, those days' marriages out of the family were unusual. The relationship between Asghar and Mir Nihal suggests the general indifference of both the generation for each other. For instance, when Asghar thinks of marrying Bilqueese, the thoughts of his father and mother stand in his way. He knows that they will never allow the marriage, because she belongs to Mughal race and his forefathers came of 'Arab stock" (Ali 33).

At this point there are two reasons for Asghar's apprehensions; first, it is predominantly because of the huge generation gap that used to prevail between the young and old in the Delhi Muslim society, second, it is the caste and racial differences that existed in the then Delhi perhaps due to the Hindu influences. Thus Asghar cannot communicate to his father himself. He could discuss the issue with his elder sister at ease. This shows that at least there exists a mutual trust among the siblings. But when Begum Waheed speaks to Begum Nihal, the latter is shocked to learn about Asghar's intent. She wants his son to merry in the family. She says to her daughter annoyingly that "it has been the custom from the time of their elders that the girls the parents have selected for the boys have been accepted by them" (Ali 57).

The novel explicitly comments on the existing caste and class among the Muslims of Delhi. For instance, when Begum Waheed insists on the marriage of Asghar and Bilqeese,

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

Begum Nihal refused "with an air of indifference" and it seems she does not give it a serious thought. She says to Begum Waheed that" they can't mix well". And when the daughter says to her mother that Bilqeese is "a nice girl and those people have money" Begum Nihal replies; "Money is not everything. It's blood that matters. Their blood and ours can never mix well. The good-blooded never fail, but the low-blooded are faithless". But the daughter keeps arguing and say that "brother Ashfaq is married there, and they are very happy" upon which Begum Nihal replies angrily; "I am not going to marry my son to Mirzaji's daughter . . . They are Mughals, and we are Saiyyeds". After this the daughter further argues that "Brother Karim had also married a Mughal" But Begum Nihal says resolutely; "Yes, but she came of the family of Nawab of Loharu. In Mirzaji's wife there is the blood of a maidservant. . .. No. I like Surayya, and she is my cousin's daughter. I will get her for Asghar". Then Begum Waheed asks her mother that "if Asghar himself wants to marry Bilqeece?" She rebuts aggressively and emphatically announces her final words on this matter that her son will marry the girl of her choice, not the girl of "his choice" (Ali 60).

Here the novel vividly elaborates the role of a traditional Muslim mother who mainly takes stand with her son in such matters despite the fact that the son wants to go against her wish. Begum Nihal is one such mother who speaks on his son's behalf. Similarly, in the role of a traditional Muslim father, Mir Nihal remains austere. He does not speak directly to Asghar. It is through his wife that he communicates to his son. Latter on when Begum Nihal talks to Mir Nihal about Asghar's intent that he is not willing to marry brother Naseeruddin's daughter and he rather wants to marry Mirza Shabaz Beg's daughter Bilqeece, Mir Nihal gets infuriated. He says to his wife:

Have you gone mad along with him? How can my son marry Mirza Shahbaz Beg's daughter? You don't want to bring a low-born into the family? There are such things as family honour and name. I won't have the marriage. . .. I can't hear of this. I have told you I don't give my consent to the match. I had asked you to stop him from mixing with those loafers and low-borns. But you did not listen. Now you want my name and honour to be damned! . . . If he marries Mirza Shahbaz's daughter, I will disown him. I shall have nothing to do with him (Ali 69).

The novel also comments on such socio-religious rituals of the Muslim of Delhi that were not religious in the true sense, yet they were practiced perhaps because of the influence of the other prevailing faiths in India. For instance, Begum Waheed, the eldest daughter of Mir Nihal, becomes "a widow at the age of nineteen, soon after the birth of her second child". She decides to live with her husband's people. For though Islam permits her to marry again, but the social code, derived mostly from prevailing Hindu practice does not favour a second marriage of a women after the death of her husband (Ali 36).

The social role of men overwhelms the domestic life of women. On several occasion, the novel captures quite candidly the traditional obeisance of a wife and other female members of the house to their men in Delhi society. For instance, at meal time "Begum Nihal spreads the

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

food-cloth on the wooden couch". Mir Nihal "washes his hands and sits on his haunches, not cross legged, to take his food. Begum Nihal begins to fan him" (Ali 7-8).

The novel's portrayal of the wedding rituals of the Muslims of Delhi calls for special attention. By and large, of all the social customs of Indian Muslims, those of the marriage are the most popular and interesting. Of all such customs those which are conducted by the men seem to be more religious as compared to those of the women. For instance, describing the engagement ceremony of Asghar, Ali records:

At last about one o'clock in the morning the bride's people arrived. . . Mirza Shahbaz Beg did not come. The party consisted younger people in charge of Ashfaq's elder brother Mir Ejaz Hussain, a venerable old man with a very long beard. He was very religious and carried a rosary in his hand. Every now and then he cleared his throat; and on getting up and sitting down he muttered loudly:' Ya Rasul Allah (O Messenger of God).'. . . Asghar sat looking shy, covering his face behind a handkerchief. . .. Mir Ejaz Hussain put the engagement ring on Asghar's finger muttering verses from the Koran (Ali 166).

At the marriage ceremony also in the men circle the events are comparatively more religious in their outlook. Ali writes:

> . . . the marriage was performed by a venerable old Akhunji Sahib, a very learned and pious Molvi, and they said, an equally Great divine. He read the verses from the Koran relating to marriage; then he asked Asghar thrice if he was willing to accept Bilqeece Jahan Begum, daughter of Mirza Shahbaz Beg . . . (Ali 172).

After this the bride is taken inside the Zenana where he is received by his mother-in- law and near relations of Bilqeece who do not observe pardah with him now. Following is "the ceremony of seeing the bride's face". Both the bride and the bridegroom are "made to sit opposite each other, and a copy of the Koran and a mirror" is placed between them. First Asghar is to see the face of his bride then she is to see him in the mirror (Ali 174).

Thus, the novel brings several traits and customs that feature the life of the Muslims of Delhi after 1857: the peculiar style of Delhi Urdu, the Delhi's love of Persian and Urdu poetry; the religious rites and rituals; the popularity of *qawaali;* the traditional decorum and mannerism in the family life; the mutual courtesy among the opposite genders; the typical gentility and decorum between the young and old generations; and the mystic Sufi aspects of Delhi. The massacre of 1857 changed the socio-cultural life of Delhi. Of the aforementioned golden traits and rich traditions of the Indo-Muslim civilization, the 'noble city' of Delhi stood as a metaphor of resistance.

Conclusion

Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* encapsulates the fading glory of Muslim civilization in colonial India, offering a profound narrative that intertwines culture, religion, and politics. By centering the story in Delhi, the novel memorializes the city's historical and spiritual significance, portraying it as the heart of a vibrant and eclectic Muslim society rooted in Sufi traditions. Through vivid depictions of cultural practices, religious ceremonies, and the everyday lives of the Delhiwallahs, Ali successfully illustrates a civilization grappling with the realities of British imperialism.

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

Thus, the novel brings several traits and customs that feature the life of the Muslims of Delhi after 1857: the peculiar style of Delhi Urdu, the city's love of Persian and Urdu poetry; the religious rites and rituals; the popularity of qawaali; the traditional decorum and mannerism in family life; the mutual courtesy among the opposite genders; the typical gentility and decorum between the young and old generations; and the mystic Sufi aspects of Delhi. The massacre of 1857 changed the socio-cultural life of Delhi. Of the aforementioned golden traits and rich traditions of the Indo-Muslim civilization, the 'noble city' of Delhi stood as a metaphor of resistance.

The nostalgia for a bygone era serves not only as a poignant lament for lost grandeur but also as a vehicle of cultural and religious resistance. This resistance underscores a collective identity that refuses to be obliterated, emphasizing the resilience of a community striving to preserve its heritage amid the forces of colonial domination. In its essence, *Twilight in Delhi* is not merely a lamentation but a testament to the enduring spirit of a civilization facing its twilight.

Work Cited

Ahmad, Nighat. "Twilight in Delhi Revisited: A Postcolonial Perspective" in NUML Research Magazine Vol 8 (1) (2010)

Ahmad, Munnawar Iqbal. "Post-Independence/Post-Colonial Pakistani Fiction in English: A Socio-Political Study with Focus on Twilight in Delhi, The Murder of Aziz Khan, Ice-Candy-Man and Moth Smoke" Islamabad; National University of Modern Languages, (2009)

Ali, Ahmad. 'Baqalam Khud' (By Myself) in Jamia, May- July 1994 Quarterly, New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia, (1994)

Ali, Ahmad. Twilight in Delhi Karachi: Oxford University Press, (1984)

Alvi, Khalid. Dr. ed 'Angaare Ka Fanni Jaiza' in Angaare, Dehli: Educational Publishing House (1995)

Askari, Muhammad Hassan. "A Novel by Ahmad" (Translated by Carlo Coppola), In The Annual of Urdu Studies No.9, 1994 Madison: University of Wisconsin (1994)

Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam. Speeches of Maulana Azad 1947-1955 New Delhi:
Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (1956)

Desai, Anita. Clear Light of Day New York: Mariner Books (2000)

Delhvi, Shahid Ahmad. Ujra Deyar (Urdu). Karachi: Maktaba e Danyal (1987)

Fyzee, Asif A. A. A Modern Approach to Islam Lahore; Universal Books, (1978)

Ghalib, Mirza. 1857, in City Improbable by Khuswant Singh, New Delhi: Penguin Books (2001)

Gowda, H. H. Anniah. Encyclopaedia of Commonwealth Literature Vol.2 New Delhi:
Cosmo Publications, (1998)

Hassan, Sibte. Introduction to Roshnae (Urdu) Karachi: Maktaba e Danyal, (2005)

Jaffar, S.M. Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India Peshawar: S. Muhammad
Sadiq Khan Publisher, (1939)

Joshi, Priya. In Another Country New York: Colombia University Press, (2002)

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

Kamran, Muhammad Dr. Prof. Ahmad Ali, Hayat Aur Adabi Khidmat (Urdu) Karachi: Anjuman Tarraqi e Urdu Pakistan (2010)

Kashfi, Abul Khair, Muqqadima Bagh-o-Bahar (Urdu), Karachi: Urdu Academy Sindh (1964)

Naik, M. K. A History of Indian English Literature New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi (1982) Publishing House (1995)

Rehman, Tariq. A History of English Literature in Pakistan Lahore: Vanguard, (1991)

Sareen, Raj Tilak. Colonial India New Delhi: Criterion Publications (1990)

Siddique, Muhammad Ali. "Roshnae Kiyon Parhi Jaye" (Why Should Roshnae be Read), Roshnae (Urdu) Karachi: Maktaba e Danyal, (2005)

Singh, Khuswant. City Improbable New Delhi: Penguin Books, (2001)

Zaheer, Sajjad. Roshnae (Urdu) Karachi: Maktaba e Danyal, (2005)

Zameer, S.H. ed. Introduction to Dilli Ka Akhari Deedar (Urdu) Delhi: Urdu Academy, (1934)

……. 'Dilli Ki Tehzeeb Kay Bunyadi Anasir' in Dilli Ki Tehzeeb (Urdu) ed. Dr. Intizar Mirza. Delhi: Urdu Academy (1984)