

Analysis of the Novel Black Bird in a White Cage by Azhar Noonari with Special Reference to Gender Disparity, Impact of Post Colonialism and Symbolism

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Abstract: *Noonari, Azhar Pakistani talent, has produced his first novel “Black Bird in a White Cage” with great critical insight. This magnum opus presents the different aspects of life very clearly. He has presented Pakistani society in general and Sindhi society in particular. The concept of subjugation of women and gender disparity is pervasive in all societies. Silence becomes women’s identity in a male dominated society. The impact of colonialism in post-colonial society can never be ignored even after the 70 years of independence. The idea of overpowering and aggression is present in one form or in another. The misuse of power is yet another feature, which has violated ethical points. In fact, because of misapplication of power and money, one becomes colonized and other colonizer even in the absence of colonialism. This present article targets to analyze the novel with critical perception of the social norms of the society possessing gender disparity, the impact of colonialism and the symbolic title have much to say about horror of dominance and hostility everywhere. It further explores negative traits of the people like hypocrisy and lust for money and power, the sources to exploit the whole society.*

Key Words: *Azhar, Gender Issue, Impact of Colonialism, Money and Power, Symbolism*

Introduction

Manoj, K (2013) in “Brief survey of Pakistani Novels in English” numerates Pakistani novelists as Bapsi Sidhwa, Hanif Qureshi, Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, Uzma Aslam Khan, Kamila Shamsie and Bina Shah. They are popular for their masterpieces like Sidhwa’s “The Crow Eaters”, Qureshi’s “The Buddha of Suburbia, Hamid’s Moth Smoke, Aslam’s Season of the Rainbirds, Uzma’s “The Story of Noble Rot”, Shamsi’s “A City by the Sea” Bina’s “Where They Dream in Blue”. (Pp, 16-22)

Among the young voices of fiction, our new Pakistani talent, Azhar Noonari, born in a small village near Rohri in Pakistan. He achieved his early education from village primary school, Matriculation from G.H.S Kandha and intermediate from Boys Degree college Sukkur. I did his B.A (honors) and M.A in English literature from university of Sindh Jamshoro. Currently he is working as lecture at Islamia Arts and Commerce college Sukkur.

He is working on his second novel *A pair of Bangles*. The novelist is innovative and dynamic in his approach to highlight issues of the society. This is a social document, which displays all the negative and positive traits of the people in a versatile way.

Black Bird in a White Cage is a watershed novel in which artistic achievements and cultural representation form a perfect balance. A complete social document representing three friends Dildar, Shahryar and Raza from Sukkur, Hyderabad and Larkana respectively. Their university life is not much discussed as compared to their practical life. They represent the three different aspects of the society. Dildar can be taken as the protagonist of the novel, who possesses a humble personality. Shahryar, on the other hand, deals with life cunningly. Raza is the combination of rigidity and modernity. Abida, Dildar's sister, Jannat, Raza's sister and Aiman, Shahryar's girlfriend like Alisha, while Neelam, who is his wife; are the most prominent, women characters in the novel. The whole novel, through women folk, presents the different aspects of life. Dildar hates corruption and there is a clash between his honest ideas with that of existing norms of the society. In a police department, when he helps a so-called criminal prostitute Roma, he is released from his job. He argues the difference between commission and a bribe. He challenges the power and authority. As a result, he misses his job.

Among two friends, Shahryar plays trick, society is full of such hypocrites and cheaters, who hunt best for themselves and bad for others. Raza does not hesitate to kill his sister Jannat, when she selects her future husband Irfan against the wish of his family. While he himself is eager to marry his officer's, daughter named Salma. From the title to narration of the novel and its characters, it is allegorical and presenting the follies and foibles of the pre-colonial and post-colonial societies. If the rampant of colonialism is taken into consideration, the author has similarly at the same length portrayed the inherent weakness of Sindhi society in particular and Pakistani society in general.

1.2 Objectives

The general Objective is to analyze the novel *Black Bird in a White Cage* by Azhar Noonari. While the specific Objectives are to:

- Focus on the gender disparity
- Examine the impact of colonialism
- Analyze symbolism and the title

1.3 Methodology

The strategy of research is qualitative in nature. The primary source “*The Black Bird in a White Cage*” by Azhar, Noonari is studied critically. Related to the themes and interpretation

critical reviews and research articles are also taken into consideration. The following questions are kept in mind while putting efforts on the research article.

Q. In what way the authority has right to decide the destiny of girls?

Q. What are the implications of characters and title of the novel?

Q. How does the novelist see the impact colonialism in the post-colonial society?

Review of Literature

From the title to the plot and characters of the novel, *Black Bird in a White Cage*, is a masterpiece and meaningful novel. Noonari, A has highlighted post colonialism with the focus on the social and political dimension. Black is a colour, which discriminates people. Sahib is a major concept of distinction.

Ahmad, Z (2013) in his article, *Post-colonial Feminism and Pakistani Fiction* throws light on this gender issue. One of the major problems of women in the non-westerner society is the gender disparity. Women because of their restricted roles in the society are treated inferior and “still awareness to be brought to such countries that women’s roles, even if accepted, do not deprive them of this fundamental right. They should not be treated like slaves of their husbands” (p.8). In the novel, one of the characters Raza said,

“... Girl is a serious matter, a serious matter of honour...”

Now the question is that why is a girl serious matter or matter of honour? He kills his own sister for the sake of this honour that she selected her future husband and ruined his honour. Jannat is described as a black bride, ironically, because of her own choice of husband. Her heart-touching dialogues pierce the heart. She requested

“Listen Ada,

I shall leave,

I shall go away.

I shall never return,

Ada, sell me somewhere but don’t kill me.” (Noonari, 2016, P, 29).

Later, her murder has been termed as ‘suicide’. Raza himself likes his officer’s daughter salma. His action is not condemned in the society. This clear discrimination is seen in Abida’s dialogue, manifestation of this difference. “I have grown up, I am eight years old I can’t go there.

I am a girl, there are ghosts many ghosts of different castes they stick to hair.” (Noonari, 2016, P, 10)

It reveals the weird concept created by the orthodox society. People spend their life according to inherited wisdom. The novelist has presented the post-colonial feminism as well.

Young (2005) explains the post-colonial feminist theory.

Post-Colonial feminism has never been operated as a separate entity. It comprises of non-western feminism which negotiate the political demands of naturalism, socialist feminism, liberalism and Eco-feminism alongside the social challenge of every day patriarchy typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killing, dowry deaths... (p.11)

In the novel, Jannat is killed for honour killing as she is interested in Irfan as against the wish of his family. Abida fails to get the rights as she is a girl. Boys can play outside but for the girls the same activity is forbidden. ‘No, no, you don’t come you are a girl’. (Noonari, 2016, p.8)

Roma becomes prey to the situation and is highly condemned by the Sahibs. When Dildar favors Roma, he is expelled from his job as he committed a sin to support the criminal. The researcher sees this high impact of the colonized and colonizer can also be observed in the post-colonial setting by the change of masters. In the independent states, men are caged in the ideas of colonizer, the setting is change but their theme is the same.

As adapted from Ahmad, Z (2013)

The Post-Colonial Theory aims at discovering the answers and knowing the question as to how the colonizers’ literature influenced the colonized people and how it could distort various deep-rooted realities and cultures of the colonized and how it instilled the inferiority complex in the literature of the colonized (P.9)

It focuses on the efforts of the writers to reinvent their own identities and culture from otherness. Post-colonial study is the struggle against, aggression, oppression and injustice against the powerful authority. This weapon of power is even abhorred by Bertrand Russell; when he explains that no doubt that the west has explored from pole to pole but it is under the weakness of one fatal fault ‘the love of power over other human beings’. The post-colonial writers like Chinua Achebe’ Things Fall Apart, Azhar Noorai has depicted this bitter truth of influence on the people especially in the character of Uncle Sham. While Dildar had visual detestation for his uniform, Uncle said. “This your identity as a sahib after all you are Sahib. Have you caught any criminal or not?” (Noonari, 2016, p.17)

In the market, he used to exaggerate his position in front of the people as Dildar was a Sahib. This is the manifestation of the fact that power is considered as the only source of

relationship. The novelist has presented the uniqueness of Dildar because of his honest disposition.

Another aspect of the novel is its technical approach. In the literary text, the words are used in such a way where they are few but hold in depth meaning. So far as the technique of the novel is concerned, *Black Bird in a White Cage* is rich in imagery and symbolism. Before going to discuss the practical understanding of the novel, it is better to show the theoretical comprehension of symbolism. Mariam Webster Dictionary defines Symbolism as “art or practice, a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial ideal”.

Campbell, J (2002) suggests that the symbol is the representation of “an object, person or situation an action or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story but suggests another meaning in the story.” (P. 153)

Etymologically the word ‘symbol’ is derived from the Greek ‘symbolon’ meaning token or watchword. The overall meaning of ‘symbolism’ is thrown together. The Routledge Dictionary (2005) gives the idea of Kant in this regard who defines it as ‘an aesthetic idea in terms of attribute, which serve as a rational idea for the logical presentation, in his critiques of Judgement in 1790. (p.232)

The title itself is allegorical, and it is echoed figuratively. ‘Black Bird’ contains alliteration. ‘Black Bird in a White Cage’ represents the idea of oppression", imprisonment and restriction. Bird if black or white is supposed to be free but here the cage represents the trial and tribulation. One of the best examples is that of Jannat, sister of Raza, who is enjoying her life as a free bird, but suddenly her only choice has led her to face the critical situation and consequently, her murder. She comes under the shadow of so-called custom. Dildar has to encounter the tragedy of losing his job because he favours Roma in Section D, who is imprisoned there. He is compelled to exist in the society where he negates the injustice but unable to change the situation. His diary symbolizes the double standard of every society where terms are changed for the sake of people’s own benefits. For example, he defines the income of a government employee

“Income: Bribe or other embezzlement of funds that a government employee makes except his monthly salary.” (Noonari, p.18)

It is the best representation of corruption where people deceive people for mercenary consideration. Where officers justify themselves by calling the bribe as commission. Even in the Pre-Colonial time, the novelist throws light on the fact colonized used to practice their traditions and culture and they were caged in their own customs and codes of life. Dildar in his diary quotes the two different types of brides termed as ‘black’ and ‘white’. Black as somewhat suspicious and negative image and this bride has been killed due to her love marriage as Jannat

in the novel. On the contrary, white symbolizes the pure bride as she gets married to a boy who has been selected by her family like Dildar's sister Abida.

Aiman is the personification of a dream to spend a life with a working husband for which she knows no barrier. She retrospect once

“How can I tell you, all I did was to make my life, a respectable life, and I tried to live life, in a respectable way, a respectable life with a working husband. I cannot live alone, to lead a mountain like life and I tried to live a life in a respectable way.....” (Noonari, 2016, P.134)

This is an ironic demonstration of her action and thinking in a respectable way. She feels no limit while committing the sin while the same she declines for others, even the visit of Dildar to the brothel. Her own action and thinking at the same time her skillful manipulation of materialism. About sitting in a luxury Black-Honda-City, she thinks loudly,

“You feel conqueror to sit in it, especially when you have not your own.” (P 137)

She does immoral act for the sake of gaining a working husband. Now the question is what is the difference between Aiman and prostitutes from the brothel? But actually, the dilemma of the society is our own misconception and certain useless thinking which are rootless. For example, Aiman's asks the series of questions and finally asserts

“Mine will be my husband's home, if I live there, if he leaves me, I will have no house no place to claim my own.”

This is a heart rending gender disparity where, girls are taught in this direction. On the one hand, she is condemned to live a life as her husband wants her, on the other hand, she is left with ambiguous life without having any goal of life.

Shahryar is depicted as covetous, clever and the double-faced man in the society. He is a merely deception. In every nook and corner of the world, we can come across these types of people. He knows the art of deceiving others by developing trust first and then breaks it silently without being inhibited. From the novel, we notice that when Dildar asked if he had informed his wife when he left for Sukkur. He answered: “I told her that I was going to attend seminar... sometimes truth perishes relations and lie binds them.” (Noonari, 2016, P. 94)

She deceives Aiman time and again by answering that they need more understanding of marriage.

“All men are not equal. Things as well. Some win and some lose in their way.”

The clear discrimination between rich and poor is a very common issue, in fact in all societies. Rich people purchase justice while the same is denied to the poor. The novel is full of such

images while highlighting the picture of poor and rich. In chapter 14, 'Red Apple' are stainless and rare which are quite expensive while 'Black Stained Apple' personifies poor as they cannot afford it. Dildar goes to the market but he is unable to buy red apple due to lack of money.

The discussion of "Patrician and Plebeian" is yet another concept to raise a voice against the 'common' and 'special'. The patrician beauty startled Raza to compel to dream of 'a settled life'. He sees the subtle border has always existed in the city and village. But at the end of the novel, Muzafar, his big Sahib rejects him after analysis that Raza is a "hypocritical combination of rigidity and modernity" (Noonari, p. 239). His smooth sailing of his life is not possible and his marriage with salma, Muzafar's daughter remains a shattered dream.

The principle of life as set by Shahryar is worth-mentioning. He asserts:

"Life is worthwhile and we should enjoy each and every moment." One should not think of limits in enjoyment, time never looks back to us, enjoyment and morality should not be confused, where there is an excessive sense of morality, there is a limited sense of enjoyment." (Noonari, 2016, P, 45).

This is the standard of a great hypocrite Shahryar, who has established different rules for the people. For his wife, he favours pure morality and dignity for the rest of the girls, he likes something else. Furthermore, this word 'enjoyment' is related to his sensuous idea of love-making and defame the name of friendship. He is a selfish figure who loves to enjoy his own life. He is pretender as well as cheater.

Another example of this hypocrisy can be taken from the novel when we analyze the character of Aiman. Dildar as a true person revealed the truth when he asserted that he needed Aiman as she was. But on the other hand, Aiman's perception. "She did not like people who have spent sometimes with the pleasure women and I had been there." (Noonari, 2016, P,)

'Pleasure women' is a reference made to 'prostitute' that Dildar comes across in the brothel. The researcher sees this hypocrisy in the assertion of Aiman, who hates Dildar to visit the brothel to see pleasure woman. As a matter of fact, what is the difference between a prostitute, who does this job for the sake of money to support her family while she in chapter 17 is compelled to assert, "Body is the only way to imprison him....." (p.190)

For her own satisfaction, she is the least bothered to be a pleasure woman for Shahriyar.

Her hypocrisy can be judged by the readers when she declares: " What is the difference if we do before or after? If I resist him now, he might resent and what if he leaves me, I shall have no other man like him." (p, 227)

This inner conflict between yes and no is finally resolved in the immoral act for mercenary consideration. Dildar in chapter 20, believes in the reality of life. "Truth is truth, lie is

a lie, good is good and bad is bad; whatever name one gives to ill practice, it will always be ill.” (Noonari, 2016, p.250)

Here the immoral act of Aiman or the act of a pleasure women is the same, Aiman’s truth contains lie and it is masquerading truth. She once said to Dildar that she hates brothel because there the pleasure women ‘willingly sell their bodies’. (Noonari, 2016, P, 104)

Conclusion

Black Bird in a white Cage fully represents Pakistani culture in general and Sindhi society. This gender issue is global and every writer touches it in the novel but the dilemma of the society is that nobody can remove it from the society as it has taken firm roots. Power is always misused when one has power, he is sahib and he must be venerated. He is colonizer and others are colonized. One has thinking and other has suppression. In the novel, Uncle Shams is the clear portrayal of this evil. “How is your relationship with Sahib? is the question he asked from his nephew Dildar. This shows the pretension of the society where relations and titles are being misrepresented and people are being fooled. The so-called people in the society who prevail justice in the society, though they don’t know the difference between commission and the bribe. Every person is caged in his/her own idea, one is the ruler and the other oppressor. No mutual communication is present among people because of unjust display and this creates menace in the society. Source for the job and legal work becomes essential and minds give birth to the double meaning of everything.

Suggestions and Recommendations

This novel is really a critical work of art. Further researches can be made on its symbolic representation, themes of appearance and reality and double-standard of society.

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