

**Subversive Resurrection- Perpetuation of Exploitation exposed by the Motif of Knock in
Shahid Nadeem's *The Third Knock***

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Abstract: *This paper intends to study the representation of exploitation of the weak in Shahid Nadeem's play "The Third Knock". Nadeem employs the theme of resurrection to present the plight of poor and weak. Nadeem shows that how the poor has to go through repetitive oppression at the hands of the powerful and are deprived of their rights. Nadeem's skillful use of the concept of resurrection and the use of the metaphor of 'knock' highlights the corruption and power play victimizing the weak in our society.*

Key Words: *Metaphor, Perpetuation, Exploitation, Resurrection*

In his plays, Nadeem uses certain tools to evoke different social issues. Such as in *Burqavaganza*, he used 'burqa' as a tool to show the hypocrisy of politicians and so-called religious scholars. Similarly, he uses the motif of resurrection to depict the perpetuation of the abuse of power in the play *The Third Knock*. Nadeem, using this motif, raises the issue of the exploitation of the weak and suggests its possible outcome.

The tenants of the compound (Katri) are shown suffering severe financial crisis and the landlord's (Haji) order of eviction adds to their sufferings. Nadeem shows that how the cruel exploiters make life harder for the poor. He depicts the abuse of power by employing the idea of resurrection. But in this play, resurrection occurs not to save the mankind, as it is in the Biblical context but to ruin them. As we see that after every 'knock' (which signify Haji's arrival and his resurrection), the miseries of the tenants increase. Eventually, what the idea of resurrection seems to suggest is that the exploiters have become so powerful that the sufferers' effort to escape is useless.

Nadeem shows his characters revolting against power, especially women. For example in the play *Woman of Sorrow*, Dukini set herself to fire to protest against women trafficking. Nadeem could have shown her living passively considering her humiliation the word of fate but he did not. She registered her protest at the cost of her life. A similar free spirited woman (Jamila) is shown in the play *The Third Knock*. She tries to persuade the landlord (Haji) to let them live in Katri but he refuses. When all the young men of Katri are arrested in charge of Haji's murder and he reappears, it is Jamila who kill him. She chooses death(as punishment of murder is death) over a pitiable life. This research paper will explore how, using the tool of resurrection, Nadeem shows the miseries of the helpless and the constant oppression of the powerful.

2. Literature Review

This research paper will focus on the abuse of power and motif of resurrection in Shahid Nadeem's play *The Third Knock*. Nadeem shows the perpetuation of exploitation of the helpless at the hands of the powerful and uses the element of resurrection to achieve this motive.

This play is reviewed very precisely in *The Friday Times* as, "A passionate and fiery indictment of the economic social oppression" (n.p). The play is 'fiery' in its nature as it is suggested, through the murder of the landlord(Haji) that no more oppression should be exercised otherwise the oppressors will have to meet its consequences. Nadeem portrays the financial and social issues of the characters in such a realistic manner that the killing of the landlord(Haji) seems to be justified.

Ms Shazia Azeem reviewed the play in these words:

In a world where the mighty suppress the weak, the play focuses on the exploitation of the poor and helpless by the rich and the powerful. The story revolves around the tiny community of locals, immigrants and destitute, living in a dilapidated compound. It is a close-knit community not related yet belonging together. . . In a very concise manner, this play focuses our entire society. It portrays the abuse of the poor by the rich as its basic theme. But at the same time it reflects the various ailments, which affect our society. (49)

The tenants of Katri has no blood relation yet they 'belong together' as Nadeem put it, 'where common interests can bind us, so can common suffering.' They seems to be one family because everyone of them is suffering and can feel what it means to be poor. The focus of the play is 'our entire society' as Haji represent the rich, the tenants represent the poor. If society bears only two classes, as it seems to be, the play is portraying our 'entire society.' Ms Azeem mentioned 'various ailment' but these ailments are not explained. These ailments can be the law(police) which aids the rich instead of the poor. Moreover, Jamila was sexually abused by the landlord (Haji). Sexual harassment of working-women is also a major issue in our society.

Nadeem uses the motif of resurrection to suggest the endless suffering of the weak. Literally, resurrection refers to coming to life of a dead person. In theology, it refers to the Day of Judgement when all the dead will come to life again and in Christianity it refers to the time when Jesus Christ returned to life again after death. Promise of redemption is associated with the idea of resurrection but in *The Third Knock* the idea of resurrection is inverted. Allan Jolan writes reviewing the play, "They kill the landlord, but he returns. They must kill him repeatedly. Each time they relive the fantasies of owing the building themselves, each time it is as if some terrible, fatalistic machinery is at work" (n.p). Jolan hints that the poor's effort of escaping oppression is futile. Certainly, by 'fatalistic machinery' Jolan means the exploiters who have entangled the poor in the web of economical needs in such a way that there seems no exit.

Though Jolan does not mention the word of resurrection yet it is clear in his review that resurrection is not of positive sort but a negative one.

In *The News*, the play was commented upon in these words, “The writer has symbolically used the murder as a revolt of masses against injustice and has shown that the poor have to go through such difficult situations again and again but find no way out”(n.p). Murder of the landlord (Haji) symbolize the possible fate of the exploiters that in case of constant exploitation, violence would be used to eliminate violence.

This paper will explore the subverted concept of resurrection with the help of the motif of ‘knock’ employed by Shahid Nadeem in order to show the wretched condition of the weak due to the exploitation by the powerful.

3.Methodology

To explore the motif of knock employed to subvert the concept of resurrection exposing the perpetuation of exploitation by the powerful in Shahid Nadeem’s *The Third Knock*, the text has been the primary source for gathering the evidence. The data has been analyzed qualitatively. The resources at the disposal of the researcher were the internet and The Professor Sirajuddin Library of Department of English Language and Literature of University of the Punjab, Lahore and Newspapers. They offered a host of critical articles on the abuse of power, essays and book reviews. The internet also proved helpful in understanding the main themes of Nadeem’s play through his biography. Moreover, the first hand experience of theatrical performance of this play by Ajoka proved very helpful in understanding the play. All these resources helped the researcher to analyze how Nadeem employs the motif of knock and by subversion of the concept of resurrection he presents the power of the rich and endless miseries of the poor.

4.Data Analysis

In the play, *The Third Knock* Nadeem employs the motif of knock to present the perpetuation of the abuse of power in our society. Nadeem, through the idea of resurrection, shows the rejection of basic rights of the weak by the powerful. All the characters of the play are shown facing severe financial crisis when landlord’s orders of eviction harass them. A number of examples from the play have been quoted in the following lines to illustrate the notion mentioned above.

The compound (Katri) is inhabited by poor tenants. Everyone bears the burden of his life with difficulty as Mansoor is a ‘skilled worker’ but ‘haven’t had any work for over three months’ (9). Ejaz too is unemployed as he says, ‘They haven’t replied to my application yet. I have heard that they have already appointed someone without waiting for the interviews...’(9). He is the one who is most optimistic among all the characters. He got a first division but could not get a degree due to ‘non-payment of dues’ (10). Though Zulfi is an employer of some Rickshaw owner yet he

too is facing trouble economically. Not only the young men of the Katri have to cope with monetary crisis, the Old Man also has to earn as he has no one to depend on. He is a tailor without any customer and if he has any, he would be paid nothing except 'good wishes' because the customer 'seems to be one of our kind' (9). Jamila has to 'work' despite her sickness because Mansoor is unable to support her. Briefly, their economic condition is pathetic.

Nadeem shows financial difference in the upper and lower class. On the one side, there are these people who are striving to survive and on the other, there is Haji (the landlord) who plans to earn more money by building hotel after demolishing the compound and orders them to vacate the house. He becomes so crude and replies to the Old Man's plea for pity as 'Go suffer outside' and 'Good riddance' (27).

It is very clearly revealed in the play that oppression is not only of financial sort. But Jamila is also abused sexually by Haji and the 'patients' of his hospital. It is also suggested that she is sick because of some sexually transmitted disease. Haji is want to make Jamila and her family shelterless because 'she is unable to work , she has this illness'(28). The landlord (Haji) slaps her and degrades all of them assuming himself mighty. Jamila's dialogue truly portrays the exploitation of the hapless and viciousness of the elite:

And you think you are God Almighty. You can reward whoever you please and punish whoever you displeases you. You are beyond reach or accountability? You can insult whoever you want to? But you day will come. You will have to pay for each and every sin you have committed, every dirty deed you have done with me. You have exploited my weaknesses, you bastard! (29)

Nadeem fully portrayed the sufferings of the characters so that their act of killing Haji can be justified. When they find no other strategy to survive, they suffocate Haji to death. They celebrate their freedom and make plans of reform as Mansoor says, 'Now none can evict us. This building is our now'(35). They all celebrate as they say, 'Jamila wants...Freedom. Old Man wants...Freedom. Bi Hajjan wants...Freedom. Bengali wants...Freedom.Baba wants...Freedom. Speak out loud...Freedom' (35). This utterance is very significant because there are many characters in the play who suffered in the name of freedom. For example, Baba lost his wife and children in the partition riots and is left all alone. Old Man and Bi Hajan lost their daughter while migrating to Pakistan. But they did not get freedom in its real essence. They are still ruled by exploiters like Haji. Their migration changed nothing except the location and the faces of oppressors. Nadeem says that this play is 'a story of shattering dreams and hopes of the generation of Pakistanis' (01). This comment of his is proved through the motif of resurrection in the play. When the tenants are celebrating their supposed freedom, there is knock on the door. When the door is opened, they see Haji standing there alive.

The idea of resurrection is found in Theology. In Christianity, it is associated with the reappearance of Christ after he was crucified. He reappeared and spent forty days with his

disciples and preached them. That was his first resurrection. It is believed that he will resurrect again to save the mankind. But in the play *The Third Knock*, Nadeem has gone one step further as he shows resurrection of Haji for three times. He has inverted the concept of resurrection as it brings no redemption for the tenants of Katri yet it increased their miseries. He shows the idea of resurrection to be an empty promise. Nadeem seems to suggest that things have become so worse that there is no redemption for mankind.

Through the incorporation of the idea of resurrection in the play, he shows the changed reaction of the characters towards crime due to endless exploitation. The motif of resurrection helps the audience to trace this notion. When, for the first time, Mansoor suggests the option of getting rid of Haji forever by killing him, all the other characters are shocked and disagree. When they smother the landlord (Haji) for the first time, their reaction is different from the second time. At first, all the other characters hesitate except Mansoor as 'Zulfi tries to stop Mansoor, Mansoor pushes him away. Ejaz looks on in surprise. Old Man is frightened' (31).

When Haji reappear, at first they are hypnotized. All the previous dialogues are repeated as the Old Man requests Haji to let them stay. Zulfi tries to persuade him for more rent and Jamila asks him to take her services into account before making them shelterless. Haji behaves in the same manner and dishonors all of them. Mansoor again seems agitated and angry. All this repetition could have proved monotonous if Haji's resurrection would not have caused change in characters behavior. This time they throttle him more skillfully, 'They all join hands in murdering Haji, just like the first time. Bengali also joins them. Haji is killed. They leave his body, which drops on the floor. They are panting. Silence for a moment. They are less shocked this time' (42). They seem fearless and confident this time. In a way, the writer is suggesting how violence occurs in our society due to utter necessity and becomes a daily occurrence due to endless miseries.

In the above given description, Nadeem brings to light multiple issues. As resurrection of Haji shows the perpetuation of miseries of the people of Katri similarly, their repeated crime shows their revolt against exploitation. They are condemned to kill him as Mansoor says, 'We have acted in self-defence. If we had not killed him, we would have been dead. We have exercised our right to live which he was denying us' (32). The outcome of exploitation is clearly suggested in this dialogue. Moreover, the crudeness of the capitalists, the rich is also shown that how they suffocate the weak.

In a way, Nadeem has played over the idea of resurrection. Through this motif, he shows the continual suffering of the hapless and also shows the power of the elite. Moreover, it is employed as a warning to the capitalist world and the exploiters that the helpless can turn to avenge if exploitation is continued. Evidences can be gathered from the play that how the weakest can turn to avenge finding no other option for survival. For example, Jamila locks herself in the room when all the other kill Haji, but at the end, when there is no one to protect

her, she is determined to get rid of him out of utter hatred and helplessness. This decision of her is portrayed as, 'Jamila gets up. There is new strength in her and hatred like that of her brother. Jamila's hands move towards Haji's neck' (48). As the play is open ended and the action is frozen at the point where Jamila attempts to kill Haji and a loud scream of Haji is listened in the dark. Her attempt to kill Haji clearly demonstrates that continual exploitation will compel the poor to avenge no matter how many times the exploiter resurrects.

It can be concluded that Shahid Nadeem truly portrays the exploitation of the wretched and depicts its outcome in the form of Haji's murder. He employs the motif knock and subverts the meaning of resurrection as a critique on the power of the oppressor and to show the perpetuation of the poor's miseries.

5. Conclusion

Though the validity of the researcher's comment is not absolute considering the restrictions of time and space yet this paper will offer new perspectives to the understanding of the play *The Third Knock*. It will prove an attempt to create awareness about the exploitation of the weak by the powerful and will prove a warning that constant abuse of power can breed violence in the society. Moreover, it will be a comment on the scope of the idea of resurrection as a tool to evoke various sort of negative thematic strands as it has been used earlier in literature as a signifier of positive thematic strands such as redemption and new life.

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