

MONIZA ALVI'S DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN CONSTRUCTING GENDER IN SPLIT WORLD POEMS AND BLACK BIRD BYE BYE

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ABSTRACT

Dislocation form a foremost concern for all the colonized indigenous people, acting as a model for the phenomenon of diaspora. This results not just in cultural assignation but cultural rotation as well. The research derives guide from Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffith's seminal work, The Empire Writes Back in examining how dislocation from a place creates concerns concerning identity and authenticity on the behalf of the writer in question. This particular methodology emphasizes on the appropriateness of an external language for the description of indigenous people in postcolonial diaspora literature. Krippendorff's textual analysis method, "Content Analysis" is used to explore and collect the themes in relativeness to women, men and place from the poetic works of Moniza Alvi along with a postcolonial theory in the background. The present study discusses how Moniza Alvi's diasporic sensibility discursively constructs indigenous female in the Split World Poems and male in Black Bird Bye Bye, respectively.

Keywords: diaspora, discursive, indigenous, place, gender, postcolonial.

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial theory denies Western theories for the interpretation of indigenous literature for being utterly and fully Eurocentric. Therefore, it is fallaciously unsound to expect postcolonial identity to be valued, appreciated and justified by the Western hands. Colonizer's inclination towards homogenization and universalization of indigenous people grounds the beginning of the postcolonial diaspora theory. Diaspora literature imagines and conceives a world, where the differences are celebrated. A concern with dislocation and displacement in postcolonial literature identifies and defines the relation between self and place, resulting in cultural and racial rotation. Whereas, the writers registering postcolonial literature from their native place do not experience this kind of literal geographic displacement and dislocation.

Moniza Alvi is Pakistani by birth. Her father is Pakistani and mother is English. She moved from Lahore to England in her infancy. Alvi's work is well known for the subject of split. Her first verse collection *The Country at My Shoulder* then *Europa*, followed by *At the Time of Partition* were nominated for T. S. Eliot Prize. Her poetic verse collection *Split World: Poems* (2008) is taken in the research which includes her fifteen years' work. The said book collects her early works including *Country at My Shoulder* along with *How the Stone Found its Voice* and her famous work, *A Bowl of Warm Air*. Some later collections like *Souls* and *Carrying My Wife* are also included in this collection. Few poems from her book *Blackbird Bye Bye* (2008) are analyzed in the research to explore the discursive constructs involved in the description of her Pakistani Father. Alvi's diasporic sensibility and consciousness builds a diasporic narrative about her indigenous identity which is utterly developed on the fantasies of her native distant place. As Ashcroft (2002) claims displacement causes pervasive concerns regarding the concepts of validity and identity. Ruth Padel registers that Alvi creates a distinction in her cultural as well as emotional insight into splits. Alvi herself elaborates to the interviewer Ghosh (2017) in "Postcolonial Writers Make Worlds" that they thought she was writing about her memories of Pakistan, but she was writing about her fantasies as she had not been to Pakistan after her infancy. Fantasy is thus primal to Alvi's poetic work.

Her poems infer her surrealistic fantasies and illusions about her native fraternal place based on a bunch of glimpses of Pakistanis life which therefore pierces speaker's suburban British world. In her most celebrated poem, "Present from My Aunts in Pakistan", Alvi writes that she has pictured her native place of birth seeing the "fifties photographs" and henceforth discovered "a fractured land" which throbs "through newsprint". She therefore constructs and cultivates a diasporic narrative about her native paternal background. Alvi's poetry celebrates a mythical Pakistani homeland of the past and probably a Pakistan

that never ever existed. Her poetic sensibility reveals the anxiety of multiple conflicting histories. She creates a third space due to her social, cultural and geographical displacement (Wilkey, 2015). Thus, in Alvi's works Pakistan look like a distant space elicited in the form of stories, anecdotes, culture, race and fictional imagery.

Research Objective:

- a) To elaborate Alvi's diasporic constructs in presenting Pakistani female in *Split World Poems*.
- b) To elaborate Alvi's diasporic constructs in presenting Pakistani male (her father) in *Black Bird Bye Bye*.

Research Question:

- a) How Alvi's diasporic gendered perspective constructs Pakistani female in *Split World Poems*?
- b) How Alvi's diasporic gendered perspective constructs Pakistani male, specifically her father in *Black Bird Bye Bye*?

Statement of the Problem

The research argues that diaspora literature resulting from displacement and dislocation rotates the culture, identity, race, people, norms and ideas. These perspectives are revisited to inform that writers registering their work from distant place cannot value and dignify both women and men because their writings replicate the acceptance and reception of colonizer's idioms. Moreover, they interpret the subject men and women within the homogenized, standardized, hybridized and universalized models and structures. The research involves both genders, male and female to prove that the discursive constructions are not gender biased, but they are applicable for indigenous identity whether it is men, women, race, land or any colonized narrative. This delineates discursive notions and models constructed by the 'outsider'. The realization to it helps in dismantling dominating atrocities regarding the land and gender.

Delimitation of the Study

Displacement theme shifts attention to the problems associated with the authenticity of presentation which results in the rotation of rich culture and identity of indigenous people. The research unlocks the ground to recognize and distinguish the possible idealistic construction of the people and their place. The diaspora writers are highly and fully appreciated in the Western discourse as the diaspora literature insinuates collaboration with the idiom of conqueror. Thus the western discourses and the narrative built on the colonizer's terms try to hybridize, rotate, reconstruct and exploit the indigenous shared space of the colonized people to erase the history annotated through their experience. This realization unties the ground in considering that the social justice is achievable by resisting the dominating discursive hierarchic structures.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alvi's work diffuses issues of female subjectivity without restricting them to an individual subject. Her works alters the global outlooks on South Asian individuality and history by splitting, receding, and tearing the concepts of dispersal communities. Bassnett analyses Alvi works as the experience of two different cultures. Alvi lies in the middle of them and therefore possibly not fully located in either. Her poetry is hence representative of billions, as it kindles a sense of belonging and not-belonging. Her works pictures hegemonic structures and patriarchy as a global glitch. South Asian societies living in Europe, India and Pakistan are similarly affected by it (Wilkey, 2015). Alvi's work acts as a shifting configuration in diasporic individualities within the context of a much celebrated and cherished post-national condition. Her post-national diasporic place is affected by the transnational activities in an intention to question the liability of nation and state in this globalized era (Saw, 2016). Alvi's "immigrancy" is the core of a diaspora's life. The crucial conception of having 'no home' or homelessness hints for having a home everywhere or anywhere. To be "un-homed" is not to be "homeless".

Bhabha pens in *The Location of Culture*, a female has this affinity to establish a relativeness with two homes at a time (Swamy, 2018). William Ghosh comments that the word, 'split', is written on the title of her poetic work, *Split World Poems*, so it is certainly a word that interested her. Alvi says, she sees there

is a theme of split she tries to mend among England and Pakistan body and soul, husband and wife. In Alvi's poetic works, split is appreciated as a painful fracture, a range or a partition to enable duality. It dramatize the procedure of mind cleaving from the surroundings, writing about a woman picturing and creating the lifecycle of her daughter upstairs along with a British child imagining and dreaming a different life in Pakistan (Gosh, 2017). Alvi's poetry has a "transformatory" power to shape the rich, flowery language offering various experiences (Hashmi F. , 2016). Alvi's poetry replicates the acceptance, incompleteness, impartiality, rootlessness and deficits at the same time (Nimavat, 2011).

Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2002) depict an account of the methods with which postcolonial literature writes back to the Empire. Their work, *The Empire Writes Back*, classifies the range and cause of postcolonial texts and defines various theories evolving from them. As postcolonial writers of the colonies suffer from the imperial and colonial activity starting from the time of colonization to this day, a continuity of preoccupations is witnessed throughout this historical process initiated by imperial aggression. This wide image of space and time permit the authors to treat postcolonial literary works as discursive fields well-defined by the persistent thematic parallels as 'place and displacement'. The widely shared structure within this is colonial imperial alienation identified by discursively constructing people and its place. The space which occurs between the place and language pronounces its forms and systems as typically a classically pervasive notion of postcolonial texts. Postcolonial writers are concerned in seeking postcolonial literature as a highly discursively fabricated discourse (Giri 1991).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Krippendorff's (2004) "Content Analysis" method is adopted to explore and gather the themes in relation to women and place from the poetry of Moniza Alvi with a postcolonial theory in the background. The research implements content analysis model to explore the "replicable and valid inferences from texts" in order to befit the meaningful material into the context of their practice. Through the conceptual content analysis method, the motifs of authenticity and identity are assembled from the poetry of Moniza Alvi and using relational content analysis model, their implicit concept are discoursed in relation to gender, male and female. Krippendorff describes the content analysis methodology as the analysis of the 'manifest' along with the 'latent' content of a book, paper, film or any communicated material. It involves classification, examination and evaluation of its primary symbols and then decoding their motifs and themes to extract the meaning leading to the evaluation of their probable effect. Symbolic occurrences are institutionalized in literature for decoding and extraction of meanings and themes. Thus, content analysis method is a theoretically model, preliminary, introductory and exploratory in procedure, and connotative, analytical and inferential in intent. The usage of work within its particular social setting and its analysis functions as a metaphor in this method.

The research uses "Critical Model of Postcolonial Literature", by Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths (2002). This model provides the tactic to interpret the relativeness of a language to place, colonizer to colonized, 'dominated' to 'dominating' and the thematic structures that are existing crossways in different postcolonial literatures. The intolerable struggle and junction with words and meanings target to subdue and conquer the experience to a language and the distant exotic realm to an imported language. The Empire writes back not only through the nationalist proclamation, but proclaims central and self-determining inquiries. This foregrounds the Western metaphysics to trial the worldview that subsequently polarizes the 'center' with the periphery. Definitely the dominating literature has an inclination of subversion and the reading of its subverting strategies and procedures are strictly rendered by postcolonial writers for the configurations of hegemony in imaginative creation of responses. By re-imagining this hierarchal structures, cultural changes in societies can be distinctly accounted.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Discursive Gender Constructs in Split World Poems

The research takes Moniza Alvi's seminal work, *Split World Poems* (2008) to dig out the diasporic gendered constructs. The social, cultural, racial and linguistic forces of a poet shifts her radical relationships of land. Alvi shades a picture of a courtyard of an Eastern bride who steps in Europe's "white washed rooms". The writer thus hints an Eastern bride to be unfamiliar to the concept of washing and cleanliness.

The bride speaks more than one language, but has no command on any one language. For “each fades” like a writing in the air, setting a way for another. The Eastern bride is finding herself amidst Western-styled furniture. She smiles in a shy manner and behaves as if she is a “child”. She dashes off loosing herself in the dark corners and bleak colors of the courtyard. The writer insists that indigenous female is unable to comprehend the European concerns. Her courtyard is filled with dirty clothes as she waits for the *dhobi*, with heaps and hills of washing (p. 74). Alvi pens in “Where You Have Been” that she has visited her native place where cow and beggars walk along casting their shadows. There the nuzzled plastic bags smell as putrefying fruit. Their odor is packed in the camera’s stomach. Alvi says women sift through the litter to find a baby, gold or edible fruit. She says, where you have been her dear camera, her son? her “one-end young man?” (p. 85). Alvi admits the diasporic lens as one ended, which partially cooperates with the idiom of conqueror. Postcolonial literature insist that limiting “smallness” to indigenous people is that state of mind which totally ignores the rich culture and history of place, it has sustained for years (Hau’ofa, 1981). In “The Draught”, Alvi writes, she will close her eyes so that she becomes invisible in the place of “invisible women” and wearing a full “load of gold jewelry” she would push down traffic clogged streets. Alvi is thus trapped with lots of jewelry on, in a trap of bones. A great draught then blows her away to her birthplace sweeping all the “colors off her *shalwar*”. The poet feels enlightened in depicting the indigenous women as undomesticated, untamed and wild. This leads a way to attain a privilege in taming the undomesticated ones. She diminishes the importance of women and their indigenous identity by negating the worth of their historical place, Shish Mahal, in an attempt to erase the history. Alvi pens she smiles on and off her face when she attempts to

hold a house of Eastern women
turning it in my hands in the Shish Mahal
palace of tiny mirrors (p. 44)

To feel scared by the untamed and wild is emotionally enlightening for the conqueror and implicates a selectivity of vision (Deloughrey & Handley, 2011). In “In Ghosts”, Alvi says, because of her mother married a Pakistani man, her mother’s father did not attend her parent’s marriage. Her grandmother and her aunt, her grandfather’s sister were there to attend, “fighting a brave path through the ghosts” they rose the shining and clarity of their glasses (p. 264). In her poem “English Roses”, Alvi’s writes that the “English girls” are like “ladies of consequence” and they are thus “superior women”. She says, what took Harinder to the rose garden? It was not “a Pakistani’s love for English girls?” Ladies thick gloves dealt with their thorns (p. 266). Western girl is considered a fascination, where indigenous brown man fails to interpret, comprehend and grasp himself. Therefore a sense of respite is created for the colonizer in taking away the narrative from their people by linking discursive to social environment. This denies and erases the great narrative, when the cause of an indigenous man is considered to be limited and confined to meager issues. Frantz Fanon (2005) says that for a native, the postcolonial dependency history is installed by the cost of locality to its empirical outsider. It is essential to identify the outsiders’ quest for the geography and somehow recover and recuperate it through imagination. Alvi highlights the dispute of colonial dependency, when she pens in “Women of This World” that some women of the Eastern world have her finger prints. The prints are running along below their skin.

Some women who I lent my clothes
are wearing them beneath the skin
Threading in and out of their skin like a needle
go my fantasies, my finest hopes
I interview myself severely
handcuff my dreams to a mountain
which seems to fit their description
I am seeking some women of this world
I have come for my fingerprints
I have come to take them away (p. 97)

Mary Louise Pratt elaborates that an auto-ethnographic expression is that in which the colonized subject presents themselves as if engaging with the terms and conditions set by a colonizer himself (Deloughrey & Handley, 2011). “The Airborne House” is an attempt to perceive indigenous women as of

partial caliber, having meager cause and free from any narrative. This facilitates the Empire, for where the narrative is muted, the subject's will is automatically erased. Alvi writes, the hospitable ladies, busy rocking chairs in the upper atmosphere are telling their servants what to do? Pakistani women are debating whether it's better to sleep near their servants or not. The poet inculcates the notion of divide and rule in the colonized mind. Moreover, she says that the girls are trying to tackle their homework in English, because their native language "is not allowed at school". By dividing the people through language, conqueror not just feels at ease, but she herself ridicules the subject too, for the insignificance of their language. They first snatch the privilege of replacing the indigenous language with standardized English and then mock them for not being educated enough to comprehend the standard language (p. 72). A gesture of demolition against people and land becomes an act of violence and ferocity against their collective memory. This broad process of what Crosby (1986) names an "ecological imperialism," profoundly transforms the globe highlighting the biological dimensions of human history. In "The Country at My Shoulders" Alvi says, she has a country at her shoulder. Alvi pictures her paternal ancestral land, where women are standing in the execution in the square. Their *dupattas* were all wet with tears, the offices are closed for a white-hot afternoon. In the summer afternoons, women are busy breaking and chipping at boulders. The hems of their *dupattas* are filled with dirt and dust. The ladies await their men and their trucks for departure. The writer discursively constructs the women, presenting only the labor women class and totally ignores the educated working class women. Alvi's cultivation of place is utterly a deliberate attempt to hybridize and reconstruct the colonized space. On other hand, she says, "I try to shake dust from the country" trying to "smooth it with my hands". This effort to domesticate the place and its people authorizes its reconstruction according to the conqueror own choice and will. The poet admits that her perception for the land came from the films. Alvi writes, "I watch Indian films" and there everyone seems either unhappy or extremely happy. She only hears of bribery and family friend quarrels from those movies (p. 37).

Casid (2004) asserts that in colonial context, transplantation is not taken as a violent reconstruction, but an organic outgrowth intermixture. Alvi's hybridity involves an organic outgrowth. Alvi's aunt Luckbir has dark red lips and the borders of her sari are broad like silver cities. Aunt speaks warmly of the novels of Jane Austen. In spite of having an overseas degree she has no desire to do a job. She has grown thinner and thinner picking rice in the fields. Alvi had dreamt her as a robust having beautiful western hairstyle and stepping outside her place (p. 36). In the poem "Etching" Alvi pens, the sparrow drawn in black and white miniature is of golden color but "the boy, who might be a girl" wears "a turban" (p. 47). Alvi feminizes the boy who wears a turban in an attempt to mock and ridicule the rich culture, race and history of the colonized land and its people.

Discursive Gender Constructs in Black Bird Bye Bye

The research takes Moniza Alvi's poetic collection, Black Bird Bye Bye (2008) to discover the diasporic gendered constructs involved in the presentation of her father. Alvi's discursive construct in presenting her father is obvious in this poetic collection. This collection is written after the death of her father. The research investigates the collection for not only a piece of her nostalgic past memories of her father, but also for the discomfort it brings in Alvi's world about their shared colonized indigenous identity which haunted her for years. In this respect, Alvi uses conqueror's idioms to portray her father's image in an attempt to humiliate him and his identity. As Ashcroft (2002) puts it, the dominating literature has an inclination of subversion and the reading of its subverting strategies and procedures are strictly rendered by postcolonial writers for the configurations of hegemony in imaginative creation of responses. She says his father's purpose to visit England in the poem "Fatherbird's Despair". Her father is blindfolded now in the home which is very far from his native home to "hunt" for "lost trinkets" in the shape of "Indian gold." Her example of Indian gold is ironical, as Indian gold was once the center of attraction for British rulers and their only reason to visit India was asset stripping (p. 55). In "The after Life of Fatherbird" she writes her father's walk is unsteady and now as he is dead, he walks even more unsteadily. He is in a need of words now and it was the same in his last living years of his life in England. Motherbird has so many words but she has not any for him, not any of them. Alvi says she waits for her father's visit in her dreams but as his father has more important things to do and passing things to act like "enjoying the soft ripeness of mango". Alvi fantasizes him eating a mango and its juice running down his front. She says his father is devoid of dignity and patience,

It may be a question of patience
dignity

now you are dead you are gaining it bit by bit.

Her father perched somewhere deep in the middle of the two fruits.

Ashcroft (2002) writes the empire writes back not only through the nationalist proclamation, but proclaims central and self-determining inquiries. This foregrounds the Western metaphysics to trial the worldview that subsequently polarizes the 'center' with the periphery. "The Tree", is Alvi's poem to humiliate her father's dual home. She personifies her father like a tree in two halves, one half is mango and other is oak. The way western discourse presents colonized people is as someone differently abnormal and heedless creation. Alvi says her father gripped and wrapped up the branches of the tree in his new Western home. But after a long long time, he couldn't maintain balance and fell from the tree like a fallen fruit. Alvi says this is because in his last months he favored only mango, so it was a "sad departure" (p. 54). The poet in "The Nest They Made" puts, her father made a nest for her quiet "differently". As they couldn't afford to hide, her father knotted multiple scattered pieces from here and there. He lined it with the scraps from a knotted *bokhara* rug and brought the threads from a gauzy Indian scarves (p. 56). As Ashcroft (2002) writes the intolerable struggle and junction with words and meanings target to subdue and conquer the experience to a linguistic and the distant exotic realm to an imported language. The Western discourse attempts to prove and picture indigenous people as uncivilized beings. Alvi further informs that her father is unable to deal with her language and his limited and constricted mind is unable to grasp their language, so after his death, he is still "practicing speaking". She comments "you take more certain steps" now towards the left and then right because "your eyes are still recovering their intelligence",

Now that you are dead, I think your first country
the one you half-bestowed on me, has almost gone
slipping away like the striped tail-end of something
I hadn't thought a country could die in this way, its edges
blurring, its heat not quite as strong (p. 25).

Alvi says in "The Suits", indigenous people are not able to comprehend their western dress codes. Alvi's father's forties' suit was bought upon his first visit to England. He came with Pakistani friends and their "we-have-arrived-suits". The poet sees her father's black-and-white snaps where he is sitting on the grass of a rural crossroad. He is wearing suit even in the countryside. She criticizes her father saying he always urged to "go back home". Her father should have gone along his Pakistani friends, because the suits of the armor they used to wear must have stood up without them. Why they walked on and on? (p. 263). Alvi writes in "Throwing out My Father's Dictionary", she brings "words" of her father's dictionary parallel to plants. This elaborates the strength of a language in the construction of a particular place. She throws away her father's dictionary into the bin. All the words grow their shoots in the bin along with the eggshells and the rotten fruit. She says its preface is as stained as cloud. She sees her father's signature rifling through his second language. By considering people as uncivilized, the western discourse emphasizes the need to tame, reshape and reconstruct the subject. Alvi says she

tries to retrieve it,
it smells of tarragon-my father's
dictionary, not quite finished with
I have my own, weightier
with thousands of recent entries
arranged for me-like chador
and sick building syndrome
in new wider pages
I daren't inscribe my name (p. 3).

CONCLUSION

The research comprehends that "an outsider cannot interpret". Diaspora literature creates concerns with identity and validity in the works of Alvi. This necessitates the need to identify and recognize the outsider's search for

a colonized identity. Alvi's poetic works discursively constructs the people of her native paternal land. Her writings hint the collaboration with colonizer's idiom. Both of her books, *Black Bird Bye Bye* and *Split World Poems* utilize subverting structures in constructing both the genders, male and female. Therefore, diaspora literature results in cultural rotation, for the writers writing from distant place experience a literal geographic displacement.

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