



IJEAST

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ENGINEERING APPLIED SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY



VOLUME : 9 ISSUE : 04 Print / Issue Publication Date: 20-Nov-2024



ISSN : 2455-2143



DOI : 10.33564/IJEAST.2024.v09i04.007

Indexed In



WWW.IJEAST.COM

editor@ijeast.com



EXPLORING POSTCOLONIAL RAMIFICATIONS IN NADEEM ASLAM'S SEASON OF THE RAINBIRDS

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Abstract: This study examines the postcolonial implications in Nadeem Aslam's *Season of the Rainbirds* (2007). It explores the aftermaths of postcolonialism and its enduring impacts on culture, religion, and language within Pakistani society. The study adopts a postcolonial lens, reflecting the enduring influence of colonial legacies on identities, religious dynamics, and social structures. It also examines the religious persecution of minorities and depicts the social and political reality in Pakistan, where religion serves as an instrument of tyranny. Furthermore, English serves as an emblem of privilege, highlighting the enduring effects of linguistic imperialism as the novel depicts the power dynamics between indigenous and colonial languages. This article contends that these themes depict how the postcolonial condition in the novel reflects overarching issues of identity, marginalization, and power dynamics that endure long after independence.

Keywords: Post colonialism, Nadeem Aslam, cultural hybridity, religious oppression, linguistic imperialism

I. INTRODUCTION

Season of the Rainbirds (2007) is a modern historical novel embedded with themes of politics, religion and postcolonialism. It was published by a Pakistani-British author, Nadeem Aslam, in 1993 who won Betty Trask and the Author's Club First Novel Award for it. The novel is set up in the 1980s, depicting the prevalent Pakistani society of the times with the backdrop of Zia's cruel regime. It shows the issue of identity, concept of resistance, political imbroglio, social commotion and marginalization of minorities in their native land. Aslam (2007) highlights the experiences and issues of minorities or rather a subjugated group of people who strive to become superior amidst the majority.

Although, Aslam lives in England but write about his own Pakistani society, gives an impression that he fancies his country, culture and people. It is clear that he has not forgotten

his country, as evidenced by the intricate details and narratives about his motherland. Aslam was inquired about his preference for writing on Pakistani society while residing in the UK, he says; "For me it is still 'bulbul' not any other English bird. It is 'chambaili' not English plant. I still miss my country." However, literature provides an accurate image of real-life circumstances, so it can be used as a medium to depict the general phenomenon and real-life experiences of people (Amrulloh, 2014).

This research article is based on critical postcolonial analysis and aims at exploring aftermaths of postcolonialism in the mentioned novel. "The word postcolonial stands for both the material effects of colonization and the huge diversity of every day and sometimes hidden responses to it" (Ashcroft et al., 2003). Postcolonialism is a concept based on both the historical movement within the sphere of literature and humanities and the assumption that the colonial period cease to exist currently but incessantly in progress in novel colonial forms, effecting our culture and society and shaping our understanding of the West and Rest. However, postcolonialism is based on critical analysis of history, culture, literature and modes of discourse specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, and France etc.

Moreover, postcolonial criticism is a type of culture criticism involves the analysis of literary texts that came under the control of European colonial powers at some point in the annals of their history. Postcolonial criticism gives response to colonialism and the entangled phenomena occurring both during prevalent-colonialism and the aftermaths of colonization (Fanon, 1965). The connection between post colonialism and Resistance Literature is obvious as both of them speak about the colonizer and the colonized. Peter and Patrick (2014) present a firsthand definition of postcolonial as a term, "it refers to a period coming after the end of colonialism" (Peter, C & Patrick, W., 2014).

This study aims to present effects of postcolonialism on culture, religion and language on society in *Season of the Rainbirds*. Maulana Hafeez is dynamic and multi-dimensional



character because his attitudes and ideas changes over the time as novel proceeds. At first he's compassionate and lenient in his behavior as he treats every matter with broad-mindedness. He's shown as a caring and loving being who takes care of not only his family but everyone around him, portrayed as a professional cleric, a God-fearing human and trustworthy person in the town. But it's until the last of the story he turns to a short-sighted person and affect those around him, including Elizabeth Massih. On the other hand, Alice who is a Christian girl and servant to Zebun, portrayed as a marginalized minority girl who is a subject of otherness and racism in society. People of her community are addressed with slurs and looked down upon because of their religion and skin color.

Postcolonialism has significantly impacted culture, language, and social institutions in former colonies, such as Pakistan. In *Season of the Rainbirds* (2007), characters demonstrate hybridity by assimilation of foreign cultural traits, including attire, fashion, and technology that highlight the enduring appeal of the colonizer's culture. However, the novel examines the class disparities that were ingrained throughout the colonial period and continue to exist in postcolonial society. These divisions emerge as feudal hierarchies, with the powerful elite acting as colonists inside their own societies, exploiting the weaker classes and perpetuating structural imbalances. Religious marginalization is a prominent issue in the novel, especially the othering of Christian and Ahmadiyya minorities in Pakistan. Religion, like language and culture, serves as an instrument of oppression, wherein the prevailing Muslim majority imposes prejudice, violence, and exclusion upon minorities (Usman, T. & et al. 2019).

Moreover, the novel depicts the persistent legacy of language imperialism. The enduring prevalence of the English language in Pakistan, almost seventy years post-independence, demonstrates the profound influence of British colonialism on the country's educational and social frameworks. According to Nabeel, English is linked to power, privilege, and elite status, whereas Urdu, the national language, is frequently perceived as subordinate. This linguistic hierarchy supports social inequalities and perpetuates the division between the elite and the populace (Nabeel, 2018). Therefore, this study explores the broader ramifications of postcolonialism in influencing culture, class, religion, and language in the selected novel. The analysis of the novel is based on postcolonial theory which aims to reveal how the legacies of colonialism persist in influencing the identities and experiences of the postcolonial individual.

Effects on Culture

Cultural fascination is the adoration of the colonizer's culture and adoption of its ideals into the colonized culture which gives rise to a new type of culture or rather a cross-cultural relationship between the colonizer and colonized. On his views on culture, Bhabha introduced his concept of un-homed home that he regarded as the state of being homeless in

comparison to a realm that is in possession of physical or concrete space but otherwise exists in an intermediary section. According to Bhabha (1994), 'un-homeness' explains the condition within the colonial and postcolonial era (Bhabha, 1994, p.13). By textual analysis of the novel, traces of cultural fascination comes into limelight which shows how postcolonialism can impact on culture of the colonized society.

In the novel, *Season of the Rainbirds* (2007), Yusuf Rao reacts joyfully when he sees a jar of coffee. He's fascinated by it for it's an element of foreign culture. Rao gets inquisitive and even asks Kasmi where he got it from. He even brandishes a coffee packed just for the sake of catching tea-staller's attention whom he wants to call. As the novel quotes, "Mr Kasmi took out the jar of coffee. 'Coffee!' Yusuf Rao exclaimed...Where did you get it?' Mr Kasmi studied the pleasure on his friend's face." (Aslam, 2007, p. 40). Similarly, in conversation between two characters barber and Zafri discuss about Mansoor's brother who lives abroad. "Mansoor's brother is in Kuwait...He's just sent them a television and a camera." (Aslam, 2007, p. 91). Out of all the things they mention about television and camera sent by him. Since novel depicts the 1980s Pakistani society and people were fascinated by exotic elements of foreign culture at that time. According to Ashcroft, "colonized people are so much fascinated by the colonial culture, language and lifestyle..." (Ashcroft & et al., 2003). The assimilation of the elements of foreign culture into native results in the confrontation of two cultures which make each of them blend and shape new identity that may be termed as inferior or superior. Bhabha propounds that cultures are the result of disjunction and displacement of current cultures (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha (1994) asserts that in the process of colonization everything lost its true essence and got vilified. In order to look like superior race, the inferior race blatantly try to copy the features, habit and culture of them. But instead of becoming like them the inferiors lose their true identity and become hybrid personalities. Bhabha borrows the botanical word 'hybridity' to explicate the essence of identity culturally. Hybridity means the bifurcation into two or more types for the sake of producing better and novel types. But in cultural context, it argues identity should be cross-cultural for there is no pure identity. The novel shows such features of hybridity as evident from text: "He was dressed in his usual blue-grey trousers and white half-sleeved shirt." (Aslam, 2007, p. 70). The mentioned quotation shows how Mr Kasmi adopts the western clothing style of colonizers and assimilate their culture. There are many instances where Kasmi and various other characters are shown clad in western style clothes because they have a penchant for western traditions and ideals and adopt them in full, hence they became hybrid as they show the personality traits of both cultures. An individual that's hybrid shows a dual personality or double consciousness simultaneously. (Bhabha, 1994).



Similarly, Mansoor's wife shown as having adoration for makeup and fashion. She wears makeup to conceal her facial dark skin tone and in this way her true identity is occulted. But the brownish skin tone on her neck reveals darkness and thus her original identity. The novel narrates, "Her face was pink with powder but the skin on her neck showed dark brown." (Aslam, 2007, p. 49). However, Colonizers seek to achieve outcomes and maintain their dominance by replicating themselves, as the subjugated or colonized individuals admire and embrace the culture of their superior colonizers. Fanon argues that black men exhibit a characteristic demeanor in the presence of white individuals, which inherently engenders a sense of superiority among whites. The inferiority mindset is perpetually fostered among non-whites due to racial enslavement. White subjects black individuals to victimization by their disdain and animosity, perpetrating acts of cruelty against them (Fanon, 1965). Just like Mansoor's wife has smeared her face with makeup to bear resemblance with whites, since it is a sign of sanctity, but her darkness fails her and shows new traits that belongs to third space. Bhabha argues it is "a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 25). In brief, third space explains an encounter between the colonizer and the colonized in a space beyond both.

The process of colonization also had repercussions on the classes of society. The creation of divisions in the strata of society had grave postcolonial impacts on life of the masses. In colonial era, absolute power was vested in British colonizers who endowed it upon the native elite class. By attaining the favor of British colonialists, the native upper class gentry exercised their power and looked down upon the hoi polloi or lower class. In this manner, different classes came into existence in the society. During the colonial rule such hierarchy of classes was prevalent and it's still in vogue after the colonial rule in subcontinent. The novel also sheds light on such hierarchical classes in the society as evident from the text: "He didn't want me to sit in the shade. He said I'd ruin the grass in your garden... 'I've worked on your lands since the days of your grandfather.'" (Aslam, 2007, p. 41-42). Mujeeb Ali, a local landowner, doesn't pay wages to peasants who work on his fields. He also looks down upon the peasant who have spent all their life working on his fields without getting sumptuous pennies. One such peasant of an elderly age tells DC Azhar that how he (Mujeeb Ali) embarrassed and ill-treated him by not letting him sit in lawn. Mujeeb Ali also contest elections and fights his election campaign with an iron-hand by threatening and intimidating people. He warns them of perilous implications if they don't vote for him in elections. Both these instances reveal feudal mindset, one of the leftovers of British colonial era. Feudal lords not only exploits their laborers and daily-wagers but also look down upon them in a contemptuous way. The character of Mujeeb Ali is depicted as colonizer who induce a rift and division in society by considering the lower class as 'others'. Feudalism is one of the add-ups to the process of class distinction

influenced by colonizers. These conditions are still prevalent, even after the departure colonialists, as it was in practice at the time of British colonial era. The colonized is unable to unfetter itself from the shackles of these ideals as colonizer strongly impinged on the prior (Sameen, & et al., 2021).

Effects on Religion

The novel shows traces of religious othering and discrimination against minorities in Pakistan. The powerful uses religion as a tool to manipulate the down trodden and lower classes in society. The powerful abuse religion by feigning its true essence to meet their own interests by subjugating and manipulating the minorities. The powerful acts as colonizer while the weaker ones or minorities act as colonized (Usman, T. & et al. 2019). Postcolonial Pakistani society, a religious hub for Muslims to practice Islam and Islamic values and also ensured the rights of non-Muslims under the rule of law and constitution. But the ground reality is contradictory as minorities are subjected to marginalization and otherness hence creating a relation of colonizer and colonized in the society.

Christians, being a minority, dwelling in Muslim majority state are at higher risk of discrimination. There is an instance in the novel, "Christian bastard,' he murmured" (Aslam, 2007, p. 24). They're subjected to religious othering and various kinds of discrimination since they're considered inferior and granted low jobs such as that of tailor, sweeper, laborer who serve Muslims. As quoted, "Why are you questioning my father...All he does is unblock the gutters" (p. 54). In the novel a Christian sewer-worker who while unblocking the gutters inadvertently splashes filthy water on the dress of the passer-by police officer. Although he manages to escape it but makes him indignant and utters slur at poor Christian worker. Caste-vocabulary is used to stigmatize Pakistani Christians (Pinault, 2008).

This actually reveals the difference between the powerful (majority) and the weak (minority). Elizabeth father, Benjamin Massih who also work as a sewer-worker is subjected to such discrimination. He is irrelevantly targeted and held under suspicion for the judge's murder for he hails from a Christian (minority) community. On both the instances the Christians are regarded as others. According to Jean Francois Staszak (2008), 'Other' is an exotic domain that occurs as a result of division of the groups; upper and lower groups. Prior is defined by merits and later by demerits. The dominant group tends to portray the lower by using ill-words like barbarians and savages.

The word 'Otherness' is basically a process when a Superior group subjugates and constructs the inferior group on the basis of stereotypes. The "Others" who are portrayed as Christian minorities or weaker in the novel are also susceptible to religious hatred and violence. When religious discrimination and prejudice is extensively assimilated into heart and mind it results in religious hatred directed towards weaker group (minorities) or otherwise the colonized. Minorities or the



subjugated ones are not only directed to religious discrimination and hatred but also result in threat and violence against them.

Season of the Rainbirds (2007) shows evidence of minorities being threatened and directed to violence. Mr. Kasmi who belongs to an Ahmadiyya minority group is bereft of his rightful place in society because of his religion. An angry mob after mauling Elizabeth Massih turn on Mr. Kasmi and chants for mob lynching him. He shouts, "Get the Ahmadiya as well." (p. 159). Even the Government lit his house on fire for the sake of votes and placating the clerics to attain religious vote. Similarly, Elizabeth Massih also falls victim to religious violence as she's is man-handled and mauled in streets for her illegitimate affair with DC Azhar. She is considered as 'Other' and subjected to stereotypes in the Muslim community up to such an extremity that nobody wants to take a glass of water from her hand and do not share their receptacles with her. The text reveals, "Last night when they were dragging that poor girl, naked, through the streets." (Aslam, 2007, p. 161). Both these instances show how other or the down-trodden minority suffers at the hand of ferocious majority.

In postcolonial Pakistani society such cases against minorities exist in reality. Christians are often restricted from drinking water from the same source as Muslims (Dilawri, S., & et al., 2014, p. 19). According to BBC, on 15th November, 2005, a violent mob of more than 2500 people from outskirts of Punjab villages attacked buildings and desecrate settlements belonging to Christian minority community. Similarly, in May 2007, CNN reported a Christian minority community being threatened in Charsadda by pro-Taliban militants.

Effects on Language

The prominent issue pertaining to postcolonial discourse is the issue of language. As Ashcroft et al. (2003) puts it, "Language is a basic tool of struggle used for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language" (p.85). Language has served as the basis for the colonizer to implement their culture on the colonized. According to Robert Phillipson, "Linguistic Imperialism is a sub-type of Cultural Imperialism. Linguistic Imperialism permeates all the other types of imperialism, since language is the means used to mediate and express them." (Phillipson, 1992). When the British abandoned the sub-continent back in 1947 they along with many cultural remnants left their language to the native people. Since then English language had had its implication on the Pakistani society, even after 75 years of its independence. Pakistani educational system highly depends on the English language as from kindergarten to post-graduate level it's in vogue and not provided as an optional subject for the natives. The British-introduced language has deeply rooted into our core values that learning and adopting English language is an emblem of superiority and higher status.

It is evident that using English language as mode of communication is looked upon as a privilege among the elite

members of the community. A person who has the knack of weaving a few sentences in English language is regarded as well-educated and someone hailing from good background. In this way other people in response try to imitate them and in process they're naturally motivated to assimilate their way of living into their lives. In the novel, Mr. Kasmi is asked by Burkat's wife, who hails from Canada, to write a letter to her son in English language. She chose him for he has proper understanding of the language. "She...wanted me to write a letter in English to her son." (Aslam, 2007, p. 40). This also reveals the imperialistic repercussion of the language in the form of fascination. Similarly, Yousaf Rao while confabulating with Maulana Hafeez, uses English words to properly express his emotions or rather to make an impression by using the – presumably-dominant language. The novel narrates, "There is a term in the English language that sums up this scheme beautifully... 'Hare-brained. It means rash and foolish.'" (Aslam, 2007, p. 121). This insinuates to a lingering myth in Pakistani society that learning and adopting English is all prerequisite for leading towards success. Unfortunately, it's seen as motivating and feat of great undertaking, neglecting the real essence of notion.

Language is an intricate phenomenon as it was used by the colonial powers for integrating their culture and ideals in the colonized society and therefore, the language of powerful dominates in country. Going through annals of history, we find out that when Harold Godwinson was defeated by William the Conqueror in 1066 in the battle of Hastings, English lost its status and instead French language was adopted as lingua franca, hence became a dominant language in the country. The same happen in the case of British colonization who introduced English to dominate the native languages. And as a result of postcolonialism, English language still dominates our country, as it's used as official language, despite the fact that Urdu is our national language. It is regarded as superior language as compared to native languages. As evidence from the novel shows: "The only reason this magazine continues to publish is that it is in English, said Saif Aziz. 'You couldn't get away with saying half these things in Urdu.'" (Aslam, 2007, p. 99)

It reveals the dominance and superiority of the English language. Aziz gives an impression since the magazine is published in English that is why it isn't banned from publishing. Since English, the official language, and Urdu, the national language, are the two main and widely spoken languages in Pakistan. Urdu is widely used as a lingua franca across the country, whereas, English serves as the language of elite and privileged institutions. According to Kachru, a postcolonial critic, people speaking English language enjoyed superior position in the society because of its association to the colonizers therefore, "the English language was part of the pose and power" (Kachru 1986, p. 5). Therefore, Urdu serves as inferior yet a widespread language known to greater masses in Pakistan as compared to English language. Publishing something controversial in lingua franca, Urdu, means



catering it to greater masses and inviting a problem for yourself.

In this context, a book of famous Pakistani author was banned as soon it was translated and published in Urdu language. Previous year Scroll staff made headlines: "ISI men' seize Urdu copies of 2008 satire 'A Case of Exploding Mangoes', claims author". Since the book satirizes the military rule, the government and Zia's cruel regime. The book was originally published in English by Mohammed Hanif in 2008 and was later translated into Urdu in November 2019. As soon as the book was published it met with international successes. However, Hanif alleged that all Urdu copies of his 2008 satire A Case of Exploding Mangoes were seized from his publisher's office by some people claiming to be from ISI, the country's spy agency - the Inter-Services Intelligence. Hanif added: "A Case of Exploding Mangoes has been in publication for 11 years now. Nobody has ever bothered me. Why now? I am sitting here, wondering when they will come for us. ISI is World's No 1 spy agency. I am sure they have better things to do."

II. CONCLUSION

Season of the Rainbirds vividly reflects the postcolonial effects on culture, religion, and language in Pakistani society. The novel, analyzed through the lens of postcolonial theory, elucidates the intricate relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. It reveals how cultural infatuation, hybrid identities, and linguistic imperialism have transformed individuals and communal identities. The characters' intrigue with foreign commodities such as coffee and Western attire depict the persistent impact of colonial culture on the psyche of the colonized, wherein the adoption of the colonizer's lifestyle results in hybrid identities. The novel also highlights the persistent religious persecution experienced by minorities, wherein the strong manipulate religion as a means to subjugate the oppressed. The struggles of Christians and Ahmadis in the novel reflect the wider societal conditions in Pakistan, where religious minorities are frequently seen "others." This religious othering mirrors the colonizer-colonized relationship, hence sustaining a cycle of subordination. Moreover, language also plays a crucial role in maintaining these colonial power relations. The prestige of English signifies the enduring influence of the colonizer's language. Characters in the story are driven to utilize English for social validation or to assert dominance, reflecting the internalized supremacy of the colonial language over indigenous dialects. It highlights the enduring hierarchical distinctions that exist after independence.

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