

White Blotches on Brown Skin: A Post-colonial Critique of "The Writing on My Forehead"

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Abstract

The formal colonial rule of Britain ended seven decades ago but the experience deeply influenced the minds of the masses and altered their lives and psyche for a long time to come. Post-colonial issues such as loss of identity, hybridity, otherness, appropriation etc are frequently highlighted by the Anglophone writers of sub-continent. The authors of Pakistani descent have contributed remarkably to post-colonial literature. The present research aims to analyse Nafisa Haji's novel *The Writing on My Forehead* (2009) to investigate Western influence on the minds and behaviours of the people of the subcontinent. Homi K. Bhabha's analytical lens (1994) is the primary guide for this research. Three elements of hybridity, namely mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness, as proposed by Bhabha are explored. The concepts of diaspora and othering in the work under discussion are also briefly touched. This research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The results of detailed textual analysis indicate that various characters are hybrids of East and West. The phenomena of ambivalence and mimicry can be clearly observed in their conduct and thinking. The most important characters in this regard are Saira, Adeeba (also known as Big Nanima) and Kasim who openly mimic the Western culture. Minor characters like Adeeba's parents and Shabana, though averse to Western culture at the surface level, are unconsciously influenced by it. The phenomena of othering, diaspora and unhomeliness are also briefly touched. In this way, the present study sheds light on the impact of colonialism on the lives of colonial subjects and links it with the continued hegemony of West over the Easterners. It will be helpful for students, teachers and researchers who wish to study Haji's fiction and the impact of the phenomenon of colonialism.

Keywords: hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, unhomeliness, othering, diaspora, The Writing on My Forehead.

Introduction

Britain left Indo-Pak sub-continent more than seventy years ago, but the legacy of British rule still plagues the souls of the people of this region like cancer. Their language, culture and even ways of dressing and thinking have been altered. They lost their honour and dignity and were pushed into a dark pit of humiliation and inferiority complex for a long time to come. Three



generations later, their brown skin still has white blotches. Whether they will ever go back to their pure, pre-colonial state is a question no one can answer with certainty.

Pakistani English writers have used their pens to give voice to the dilemmas of their post-colonial nation in abundance. Hanif Kureishi, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie, Mohammad Hanif and Jamil Ahmad are some of the stars of this constellation. The name of Nafisa Haji, a brilliant American writer of Indo-Pakistani descent, is not new to this list. She is the author of two novels: "The Writing on My Forehead" and "Sweetness of Tears" which were published in 2009 and 2011 respectively. Her first novel, *The Writing on My Forehead*, was a finalist for the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association Book of the Year Award. It is perfect for post-colonial analysis and especially the study of hybridity. Nafisa has firsthand knowledge and personal experience of issues of identity, gender, religion, race, ambivalence, cultural amalgamation and hybridity, discrimination, mimicry and unhomeliness. Her fiction is strengthened and backed by her own experiences in the region and abroad which are common to large numbers of Indo-Pakistani immigrants residing in the West. Little to no work has been done on Haji's novels so they offer a vast scope for research. The present study analyses and discusses Haji's selected work, namely "The Writing on my Forehead" from post-colonial perspective. This research will be helpful for teachers and students interested in understanding the phenomenon of colonialism and its impact. It will widen the mental horizons of both the colonized and the colonizer and equip them with the ability to think critically. It will serve new researchers and critics who wish to explore the works of the writer under discussion.

Literature Review

A number of research studies have been done to explore the writings of Indo-Pakistani authors from post-colonial perspective. Waworuntu and Arianto (2019) used Homi K Bhabha's framework to analyze Hanif Kureishi's short story "My Son the Fanatic". The main characters Parvez and his son Ali are Pakistanis living in the UK. The identity crisis and superior-inferior dichotomy between Europeans and their former colonial subjects gives rise to ambivalence and mimicry. Parvez tries hard to merge into the Western society, in an attempt to elevate his social status but he fails in his pursuit. It is through Parvez's character that mimicry is highlighted mainly in the story. Ali who is bred in Europe harbors mixed feelings about Western society. On



one hand, he expresses his distaste for Western education and way of life and on the other hand, he continues to reside among the people he claims to abhor which shows his ambivalent attitude. Parvez's dreams and dialogues highlight that he is also ambivalent in his attitude. Additionally, the researchers found a major element of resistance towards imperial practice in Ali's character.

Nayebpour (2017) also explored the ambivalent nature of colonial mimicry in *My Son the Fanatic*. The researcher found that the father tries to mime Western culture thereby accepting its superiority and the inferiority of his own Eastern heritage but the son revolts against Western cultural invasion by attempting to erase everything that represents it from his life.

Wahid (2018) explored Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* from post-colonial perspective and found the elements of metropolitanism, hybridity, othering, nativism, diaspora and unhomeliness in the novel. The researchers found that Sajjad's dialogues highlight the aspect of metropolitanism, nativism and hybridity. He is sandwiched between British and Indian cultures. Moreover, the study analyzed various characters from the perspective of othering. Sajjad and Hiroko Tanaka are the main objects of analysis for the phenomenon of othering. Lastly, the element of diaspora or unhomeliness is analyzed. Sajjad is the main victim of diaspora and feelings of unhomeliness.

Gul, Noor and Singh (2016) analyzed Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* using Homi K Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Their essay "uses mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness, concepts under hybridity, to facilitate the understanding of Feroza's experiences in *An American Brat*." (Gul et al., 2016). Feroza and her uncle Manek mimic Americans but their mimicry is ambivalent. They are hybrids of two cultures and at times experience feelings of unhomeliness because of it.

Ali (2018) explored the concepts of indigenous identity and hybridity in Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*. Many types of hybridity were found in the novel which include linguistic, racial, religious, cultural, and political hybridity. The twins who are the narrators of the story spoke a mixture of Indian and English tongues like many other characters in the novel. An amalgamation of Indian and English culture is presented through the characters of Pappachi and Chacko. The twins and their cousin Sophie Mol are an example of racial hybridity whereas



religious hybridity can be seen in the union of individuals from Hindu and Christian backgrounds.

Ayaz and Anjum (2018) analyzed Kamala Das's poem "An Introduction" from a post-colonial perspective. The researchers investigated the selected poem for multiple relevant factors. They found that Kamala Das supports the use of English tongue and its mixing with the local languages which is an example of cultural hybridity resulting from the practice of colonialism. The concepts of "self" and "other" have also been analyzed with a focus on rebellion and resistance against tyranny of colonial rule and patriarchy. Discrimination based on color is also identified.

Haroon (2015) explored *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee and *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal. She studied the protagonists of these novels who are transnational and/or transcultural South Asian females, as postcolonial hybrid subjects. Their statuses as colonial "Others" and as hybrids of two cultures is highlighted. Post-colonial feminist theory, women of color feminism and the conceptual framework of whiteness studies are the primary focus of the researcher in this study.

Khrais (2020) analyzed cultural struggle and conflict experienced by the protagonists in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. The concepts of hybridity and assimilation are applied on the selected work. The researcher found that Ashima succeeds in adopting and embracing Western culture while retaining her own Bengali heritage and identity. Her husband, Ashok, on the other hand gives up on his heritage completely but continues to respect it, nonetheless. Another character, Gogol, is found to be an embodiment and assimilation of cultural hybridity.

As mentioned earlier, Nafisa Haji is an American author of Indo-Pakistani origin, and her debut novel falls in the category of post-colonial fiction. Since, the selected work has not been explored before, it offers a vast scope of research. The present research uses the post-colonial lens to probe the selected novel. The theory of hybridity is the chief focus of the researcher in this study, but the elements of diaspora, unhomeliness and othering are also briefly touched during the present research.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The aim of post-colonial theory is to counter the impact of the remnants of colonialism. Makaryk in Faruk (2007) defines postcolonial theory as a collection of theoretical and critical



strategies whose aim is to question the position of colonial and post-colonial subjects. This theory is employed to explore the cultural characteristics and productions such as history, economics, politics, literature and various other types of documents of ex-colonial countries after the end of formal colonial control. Post-colonial theory can be studied under a large number of subcategories but only a few of these categories have been explored in the course of this research. These chosen concepts and categories are explained as under:

Hybridity is one of the most commonly used and disputed terms associated with post-colonial theory. Ashcroft et. al (2007) states:

...Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. As used in horticulture, the term refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc.

An important name associated with this term these days is of Homi K. Bhabha who explores the colonizer-colonized relations in his works and insists on their interdependence. Bhabha (1994) calls hybridity an "in-between" or "interstitial" space that gives birth to new signs of identity through a negotiation of differences (pp.1-2). Mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness are three main concepts that fall under the umbrella of hybridity. According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1994: 86). Mimicry is derived from the Greek word "Mimesis" which means imitation or copying. Mimicry can resemble mockery at times. It carries an element of menace for the colonizing powers because as the lines between the colonizers and their respective subjects are blurred, the authority of the colonizer comes into question.

The term "ambivalence" was first used in psychoanalysis to describe the presence of opposing emotions and desires in a person. In ambivalence, a person exhibits love and hatred or attraction and repulsion towards something at the same time. According to Young (1995), it is an attraction as well as an aversion towards a particular object, person, or action. According to Bhabha, "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 1994, p.153). Aspects of the colonial subject's own culture and that of the colonizer assimilate to form an amalgamation of



differing cultural values, beliefs and norms. The concept of ambivalence is closely related to the concept of mimicry.

The term "unhomeliness" is derived from the German word "unheimlich". This term was first coined by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, unhomeliness is linked with feelings of unfamiliarity and that which is unknown (Freud, 1919, p.220). Bhabha, inspired by Freud, discussed unhomeliness in his essay "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition in The Location of Culture" (1994). Home is something more than four walls and a geographical/physical location. Feelings of unhomeliness include feelings of estrangement and a lack of a sense belonging to a place and its people.

In the House of Fiction [there is] the deep stirring of the "unhomely." You must permit me this awkward word— the unhomely— because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place... In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (Bhabha, 1992, p.141)

Diaspora is the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their native lands to other parts or regions of the world. Colonialism itself was a diasporic movement that involved the movement of Europeans to other parts of the world where they ruled and built their colonies. In addition to that, the colonized people were transported to other parts of the world for laboring and work. Colonization, in this way, resulted in a dispersion of people belonging to different races and regions across the globe. Different races intermingled as a result of this phenomenon.

Othring is another important concept associated with post-colonial theory. This term was first coined by Gayatri Spivak to describe the process whereby colonial subjects are described and labeled as "others". The 'other' is anyone who is separate from oneself. The colonizer and colonized dichotomy had its roots in Othring.

The present research is qualitative in nature and comes under the subcategory of descriptive research. The data comprised of the text of the novel "The Writing on My Forehead". The text is thoroughly studied using the technique of close reading to find out the post-colonial



elements present in it. The results are presented in the section below with supporting lines from the text to prove the researcher's point.

Analysis

The Writing on My Forehead weaves the stories of several characters and how the phenomenon of colonization impacted them. A number of characters in the novel exhibit cultural hybridity. They are sandwiched between Eastern and Western cultural norms and values. Saira, her parents, her aunts and uncles, her grandparents are all an amalgamation of East and West. They have beliefs that align better with the Western world, but they also adhere to Eastern values and traditions at the same time, so we can justly call them hybrids. Hybridity exhibits itself in their actions, thoughts, and feelings.

Saira and Ameena, the two sisters, like several other characters are hybrids of East and West. Ameena is a modest and obedient daughter who practices her religion. She doesn't do anything that might displease her parents. She gets engaged to a man chosen by her family but after the engagement, she goes out with her would-be-husband on dates and takes the liberty of kissing and making out with a man who wasn't her husband then, in opposition to her mother's instructions and training.

"It was impossible to believe that Ameena, goody-goody Ameena, who would normally avert her eyes at the steamy sex scenes that daytime soap operas and nighttime dramas were so full of, could actually endure and enjoy such indignity". (p. 109)

Saira, the narrator of the novel from whose point of view the story is told, on the other hand, appears to have adopted western lifestyle fully and without any remorse. She participates in a play in which her character demands her to act boldly by wearing revealing clothes, kissing boys and using vulgar language. Saira describes the character she was chosen for in the following words:

My name was up there, next to the name of the character I was slated to play. Rizzo. Rizzo the anti-virgin. Rizzo of "false alarm" fame. Who had to swing her hips—no, her pelvis!—around in the Sandra Dee number. In her underwear. Who went around with not one, but two guys. Two guys!. (p. 116)



When her parents find out about their daughter's part in the play, they scold her. Her mother is furious and disappointed in Saira at this occasion which mirrors her Eastern roots. This was her mother's reaction:

Get out of my sight, you shameless, shameless creature! You slut! Whore! Dancing around on stage, half-naked! Randi! Slut! This is what I have raised, oh, God forgive me! What did I do, what did I do to deserve this humiliation, oh, God, it must have been something terrible to deserve this! Kissing boys—in front of the whole world! Slut, whore! In front of the whole town! Where will I show my face, Ya Allah, she has left me with no face to show to anyone! (Mummy, p. 123)

Later in the novel, she chooses to have sex out of wedlock with multiple men and have a job that requires her to travel around the globe alone. She grew up to be an imitation of a typical, bold and modern Western girl. This shows how Saira and her immediate family were cultural hybrids. She was a daughter of an Eastern family who grew up in the US and had been dyed in Western colors.

Saira's uncle, Ahmed Chacha, who lives in England with his wife, Nasreen, and two children, Mehnaz and Mohsin, drinks alcohol and has a western way of living but he opposes his children's bold life choices. Mehnaz has a boyfriend early in the novel, she goes out scantily clad and smokes and drinks. She, though a daughter of Indo-Pakistani parents, enjoys all the liberties the West has to offer. However, later in the novel, she succumbs to family pressure and decides to get married and settle down the way her father always wanted her to. Mohsin, on the other hand, turns out to be a homosexual and doesn't budge under family pressure. All these choices essentially reflect Western influence which make these characters hybrids of the two cultures.

In the same way, hybridity can also be observed in the character of Adeeba or Big Nanima who plays an important role in establishing the main theme of the novel. She was born and raised in India but later migrated with her family to Pakistan. Even though she is a Pakistani resident, she lives independently like modern Western women. She gets an education, despite all the hurdles and even goes to London for higher education. She is a professor by profession. We come to know that she loved going to clubs for dancing during her stay in London. However, despite her inclination towards Western ideology, she is a woman of East and knows that she



cannot cross certain cultural boundaries, for instance, she is willing to accept her parents' decision when it came to marriage and doesn't fumble with social limitations imposed on her by finding a guy herself or engaging in premarital affairs. So it won't be wrong to conclude that while having Eastern values, Adeeba has a Western outlook and is the perfect example of post-colonial hybridity.

The colonized people often regard the culture of the colonizers as superior and try to imitate their former colonial rulers in an attempt to elevate their own status. This phenomenon is most prominent in the character of Kasim. Kasim, Zahida's husband and Saira's maternal grandfather, is a religious and hardworking Desi man but under the colonial impact, he loves and adopts a number of Western hobbies and traits. He demands to marry a girl who speaks English, which however doesn't happen. The following lines from the text elaborate Kasim's love for Western fashion:

His only weakness was his love for things from the West. After Independence, his business boomed. And what he didn't spend on the poor, he spent on the merchandise that Westerners of high status seemed to treasure. He wore elegant Italian tailored suits and shoes and expensive Swiss watches. Nothing but the finest. He drove a big American car with fins and tails (p. 16).

When he married Zahida, he made her wear sleeveless blouses and took her to a salon to get her hair cut short. Later, he fell in love with an Englishwoman, named Belle and married her. All of this shows the strong colonial impact on the minds and tastes of colonial subjects.

Adeeba or Big Nanima, takes pride in the fact that she knows English and went to England for higher studies. She has been shown as superior to other characters and especially in comparison to her sister Zahida, who didn't know English and was a traditional Eastern woman.

After being ruled by English people, the masses of sub-continent internalized colonial discourse to the extent that the people who resembled the colonizers were seen as attractive and the opposite kind of people were looked down upon. The worship of Eurocentric standards of beauty resulted from the colonial rule of White people. Fair skin, straight and light-colored hair and English features came to be regarded as attractive while whitish complexion, wavy hair and thick facial features were associated with the locals and hence considered inferior or less



attractive. This can be noticed in the novel as well. Zahida and Adeeba differ from each other in their physical appearance. Zahida is considered highly attractive and desirable because of her fair skin, straight, light brown hair and green eyes while Adeeba, on the other hand, is constantly told that she isn't beautiful just because she doesn't resemble the ex-colonizers. In the following lines, Adeeba describes Zahida's beauty:

Because my younger sister, Zahida— your Nanima—was startlingly beautiful. She had light brown hair, green eyes, and sharply symmetrical features. Zahida's skin was translucent and luminous, and she was pale. With oh-so-beautiful, silky, straight hair that fell to her waist. (p. 45)

Adeeba describes her own physical appearance rather unfavorably in these words:

...A plain face. With skin that was—well, rather dark.” ... “And hair that is easier to laugh at now than it was then. I tried everything. Pigtails, a ponytail, braids, a bun. But nothing could tame that unruly mass (p. 45).

Dark skin and hair that don't bear any resemblance in color and texture to the hair of the colonizers are looked down upon and considered ugly.

Three main elements that come under the umbrella of hybridity, namely mimicry, ambivalence and unhomeliness have been extracted and examined below. Light has also been shed upon the aspects of diaspora and othering.

Mimicry in *The Writing on My Forehead*

Residents of ex-colonies view their own culture as inferior and try to imitate their former colonial rulers in their attempt to achieve greatness as they have been conditioned into thinking that the colonizers are more civilized and superior to them. So, they mimic and imitate the invaders in their speech and action. The goal that the colonized people wish to attain by the act of mimicry is to attain the same power and position enjoyed and occupied by the colonizers. The stronger the belief in the superiority of the invaders, the more likely will the colonized people be to imitate them and their culture.

Saira, the main character of the story, is the daughter of parents of Indo-Pakistani descent. She lives with her sister, Ameena and parents in the United States. Saira is drawn towards Western culture from a very young age. She aspires to be free like a bird. She admires



the liberal choices made by Big Nanima and hopes to have an independent and free life. At school, she participates in a play and does a number of things that would be frowned upon in the East. She wears revealing clothes as per the demand of the play, co-acts with boys, speaks lewd dialogues and kisses boys. Her parents are shocked and disappointed when they find out. Saira, later, influences her parents through Ameena and Shuja to convince them to let her go to a university far from home. At the University, away from the sight and restrictions of her parents, she adopts a completely Western lifestyle and breaks all the rules and restrictions imposed by the Eastern culture and religion. She sleeps with multiple boys, dates, drinks, takes drugs and dances. Her mother had Saira promise at the time of leaving for university that she would stay away from all these things, but Saira did everything contrary to her mother's desires.

"Alcohol came first. Then pot. Dating. And then sex. Sex, not love." (p. 132)

Like most modern Western women, she chooses "not to save her virginity for the sanctity of a wedding night" (p. 133). In fact, she chooses to remain unmarried till the end of the novel. The most shocking aspect of her mimicry of Western culture can be observed in the fact that she ends up getting pregnant with the baby of her then boyfriend, Majid Khan, who is much older than her. She is condemned by her mother, Shabana who is horrified to find out that her unmarried daughter is pregnant but Saira, completely colored in the Western lifestyle doesn't care and contemplates getting an abortion. She works as a journalist and travels around the world. All these actions and traits of Saira are a mimicry of the Western culture.

The character of Kasim is the second most important character in this regard. He imitates the lifestyle and physical appearance of the ex-colonizers. His daughter, Shabana, comments on her father's mimicry of the Westerners in the following words in chapter 1 of the novel:

His only weakness was his love for things from the West. After Independence, his business boomed. And what he didn't spend on the poor, he spent on the merchandise that Westerners of high status seemed to treasure. He wore elegant Italian tailored suits and shoes and expensive Swiss watches. Nothing but the finest. He drove a big American car with fins and tails.

When he and his beautiful wife were first married, in the days before his fortunes were made, he took her to a beauty salon and asked the stylist to cut her hair according to the



latest trends to be found in European beauty magazines. They cut off her yard-length, dark, silken hair. She cried for days, not consoled by her husband's praise and assertions that now, at least, she looked 'modern' and 'Western.' He made her wear her saris with sleeveless blouses, the kind that were in fashion among the Bombay film crowd. (p. 16)

Kasim loved to dance and arranged for his wife to learn ballroom dancing. He took her to clubs and nightspots and eventually, left his first wife to marry an Englishwoman, named Belle. This shows the peak of his adoration and aspiration for a Western lifestyle. With Belle, he lived a life filled with Western delights, liberties and interests. He continued his love for ballroom dancing with much more freedom and enthusiasm after marrying Belle who was a hippie woman. When Saira asks Belle, in chapter 5, if her Nana took Belle dancing, Belle replies: "All the time! He taught me—ballroom dancing, I mean. Speaking of dancing!" (p. 71).

The character and life-story of Adeeba, who is also known as Big Nanima, is also important to consider to find the traces of mimicry. She got her early education from Convent where she later worked as an English teacher and interacted with many English-women. She tells Saira how she wished to cut her hair short like many English-women from the Convent where she studied and later worked.

I did the best I could, tried to do something with my hair, wishing, not for the first time, that my mother would have allowed me to cut it down to size, like so many of the Englishwomen I had gotten to know through school. They were visitors from England, educational experts who had been invited to observe and help to improve the British-run convent school that I used to attend. The school where I now taught English. Though no one but my father knew that. (p. 46)

She got influenced by the thinking and style of English women. She tells Saira, that she finally had the courage to cut her hair short when she went to London to study.

"See how short my hair was in this picture? How I always hated it—so curly and unkempt! Since our days in Bombay, before Partition, I had longed to chop it off. But only when I was in London, far away from my mother, did I have the courage to finally do it." (p. 44)

From these lines, it's clear that she always wanted short hair like White women but didn't have the courage to cut it while she was in Pakistan. So when she went to London, she finally did



what she wanted i.e cut her hair short. This is how she mimicked the colonizers in her appearance.

She was very progressive and practical in her outlook on love, life and marriage like Europeans and studied the works of English authors. Jane Austen, a British writer, was her favorite. She is influenced by Western thought but at the same time is aware of the socio-cultural limits imposed on her by the Eastern society so she doesn't indulge in anything that won't be socially acceptable.

I was not a stranger to ideas of romance. Part of the reason I so loved English literature was because of the importance it gave to romantic love. It was an abstract ideal, however, and one which I was perfectly happy to wait to discover within the context of social acceptability and economic necessity. One of my favorite authors—you know, Saira—was Jane Austen, who well understood the need for reason and pragmatism with regard to matters of the heart. The success of a marriage depended no less on economics than on an intellectual understanding between its participants. And here, finally, there was hope for that. I had not given much thought to the boy in question, beyond marveling at the progressive nature of his desire to be wed to an educated girl—a girl who spoke English, no less! My father had met him before, had known his father (p. 48).

When her family faced economic hardships and crisis, she stood up and became a helping hand for her father. Eastern women typically aren't expected to earn but Adeeba who followed and agreed with Western social norms chose to work and earn a living instead of depending on the men in her family to fulfill her financial needs.

Adeeba moved to London rebelling against the socio-cultural norms of the East. Her father was shocked when she expressed her desire to avail this opportunity. He remarked: "Adeeba, how can we let you go so far away? Alone? It is not right, beti, it is not right that a young woman—an unmarried young woman —should be so far away from her family." (p. 55) But Adeeba pursued her dream nonetheless.

Adeeba enjoyed going dancing during her stay in London. She confesses to Belle in these words:



“Well, don’t tell anyone, but I used to go dancing a lot. In London, when I lived there many years ago.” (p. 71)

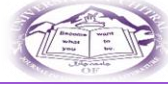
This shows that she fully relished her stay in London but without letting her family know in order to save herself from their objections.

After her return from London, she got a well-paying job at a college. In spite of her family's opposition, she chose to live independently at the residence offered to her at the campus. Again, this is an act of mimicry of the West since it isn't considered socially acceptable for a young, unmarried woman to live independently in Pakistan, but it is a common practice in the West. Her mother supported her in her decision to go abroad to study and then to live on her own by accepting the residence offered to her by the government. This shows that even the least educated and aware sections of society, such as illiterate women like Adeeba's mother, had been influenced by Western occupation and their outlooks on life and social issues had shifted to share a more Western perspective.

Mimicry can be noticed in the minor characters of the novel as well. Majid Khan, a Pakistani writer, has illicit relationships with women. Shuja touches and kisses his then fiancée, Ameena, which shows his adoption and mimicry of the Western culture. He doesn't wait for her to become his wife before engaging in physical intimacy with her. Saira's cousin, Mehnaz drinks, smokes, dances, wears western clothes and has a boyfriend. Her brother, Mohsin, is eventually revealed to be a homosexual. In spite of everyone's opposition, he continues to live his life according to his liberal beliefs and doesn't care about the condemnation and disapproval of his family and relatives. Hence, all the characters discussed here tried to enter the glorified circle of West by imitating the Western rituals and culture but instead of attaining the glory and status enjoyed by the White people, they became cultural hybrids who resembled their colonizers but weren't completely identical to their former rulers. Their mimicry is more of a mockery and they belong neither to the East nor to the West. A new identity has been constructed for them by the interaction of these two opposite poles.

Ambivalence in *The Writing on My Forehead*

Ambivalence according to Young (1995) is an attraction as well as an aversion to a particular object, person, or action.



Saira, the protagonist of the novel is residing with her family in the United States. Her parents choose to leave their own land to live in a foreign country. They prefer American lifestyle and enjoy the benefits and perks that come from living in the West. They choose a man settled in the United States for their daughter Ameena to marry and want the same for Saira. They send their girls to Western schools and live as a nuclear family in the United States as opposed to having a joint family system. But in spite of their choice to enjoy living in the US, they show ambivalent attitude towards the West and their own homeland throughout the novel.

Saira's mother, Shabana, wants her daughters to live in the West but remain tied to Eastern norms, values and beliefs. Even though she herself chose to clad her daughters in western clothing when they were little, she prevents them from wearing short Western clothes after a certain age, as Saira states in the novel:

At nine, Mummy believed, shorts and dresses and skirts that ended above the knee were no longer appropriate forms of attire for girls—her girls, anyway. The day before I turned nine, as Mummy sorted through my closet and dresser, tossing shorts into a pile that she would later give to Goodwill, she told me about a childhood friend of hers who had nearly died of snakebite back in India, because she was wandering heedlessly through the garden in a dress that was way too short when a cobra, which had escaped from a snake charmer's basket, struck her on the thigh. (p. 14)

Shabana's ambivalence is clear in the fact that she prefers to stay in the West but is opposed to certain aspects of Western lifestyle. She doesn't want her daughters to wear short clothes but is also unhappy when Ameena decides to start wearing hijab later in the novel. This is a sign of her ambivalence. Additionally, she abhors dancing which is common in the West. She criticizes her late father's love for dancing, western fashion, music, literature and lifestyle. She tells stories to her daughters to inculcate eastern values in them. As a result, Saira and Ameena are knotted between two cultures and hung between two entirely different ways of life. She believes that a woman's place is in the household and that the goal of a woman's life is to be happily married. She tries to raise her daughters to be modest housewives and succeeds in her pursuit to a great extent in the case of Ameena, at least. Saira, however, doesn't turn out to be the



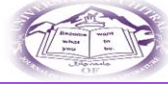
way her mother wanted her to be. In spite of her love for Eastern values, she is not willing to move back to Pakistan which shows her confusion and ambivalence.

Saira's character is the most important when exploring ambivalence in the novel. At a young age, she participates in a lewd play at her school, dates boys, wears revealing clothes and engages in sexual activities but at the same time, she fears that others, especially her mother, will find out about her adventures and misdeeds. When her mother does find out, she appears guilty and remorseful. It won't be wrong to conclude that Saira has an ambivalent attitude. She finds dating, drugs and alcohol thrilling but at the same time feels ashamed of her involvement in such activities and tries to hide them from others, particularly her mother, which is a proof of her ambivalence. Saira was taught religion and Eastern ethics since her childhood, but American culture and ideology affect her and become so deeply ingrained in her thinking that she doesn't see anything wrong with drinking and having illicit relationships.

A juxtaposition of Eastern and Western views can also be witnessed in Kasim's character. He is a modest Indian Muslim who prays regularly and helps the poor according to the teachings of his religion but at the same time, he is very fond of Western fashions. At the time of his marriage, he demanded to be wedded to an English-speaking woman. He likes to dress in Western clothes and wants the same from his wife. When he marries Belle, his family boycotts him but he tries to stay in touch with his children. On one hand, he wants a free life with an Englishwoman but on the other hand, he is not ready to completely give up on his relationship with his family in India and Pakistan and longs to be near them which shows his unbreakable ties with the East. It seems that he wants to have the best of both worlds which is a symptom of his ambivalent nature.

Unhomeliness, Diaspora and Othering in *The Writing on My Forehead*

Diaspora that resulted from European occupation is a phenomenon that can be observed in the characters of this novel as well. Multiple families introduced to us in the novel have drifted away from their native land and are settled in the West in hope for a better, safer and more prosperous life. Saira and her family live far away from their native land, in the United States. Similarly, Ahmad Chacha is residing in England with his children. One of Saira's aunts, Jamila Khala, also settled in England after her marriage. Kasim's children from his second marriage



with Belle are also dispersed around Europe. As victims of diaspora, these people are dispersed in various parts of the world and in these parts, they aren't fully accepted. There is a sense of estrangement and lack of belongingness. They are seen as "others" by the native inhabitants of these places. After the incident of 9/11, South-Asians residing in the US feared for their lives and safety. When Saira and Big Nanima watch the news, they realize that the Muslim immigrants will have to pay the price for what happened. They fear for Ameena's safety who was in the US at the time of 9/11 and has to face the aftermath of the twin towers explosions. Ameena, who is a practising Muslim and starts observing hijab after Sakina is born to be a good role model for her daughter, is victimized and killed because of her attire that is associated with the Islamic faith. Believers in Islam were seen as "others" in Europe. They were collectively blamed and held responsible for the wrongdoings of a few who spotted the name of Islam. Muslims were seen as inferior and evil. They were not given the status of being fully human. This East/West superior- inferior dichotomy is a direct corollary of colonialism. The extreme of othering, in which people are labelled and hated because they are of a different race or faith can be observed in the brutal and inhuman killing of Ameena near the end of the novel. Ameena's life is taken for no reason other than her faith and race. It reflects the contempt for Muslims in the West. Muslims are mercilessly crushed under the feet of the former colonial masters. The gist of othering is that anyone who is different from one's own self is hated and feared. After 9/11, Ameena lost her life and the cause of her murder was nothing other than her being seen as a part of an inferior race which is seen as uncivilized, crude and backward. Muslim immigrants were labelled terrorists and targeted by the Western people after the 9/11 incident.

Discussion

Analyzing *The Writing on My Forehead* using post-colonial lens reveals how the characters are colonial subjects. The way most of them view the Western culture exposes their sense of inferiority complex that they share with the people of the sub-continent. Throughout the novel, Western lifestyle, values, norms and beliefs are glorified while everything that is associated with the East is shown to be inferior, backward and less civilized. Even the evils of Western society like drug abuse, alcohol consumption, illicit relationships etc are shown to be "normal" and acceptable parts of life even though they are frowned upon in the East. This is how



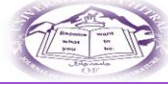
the West has brainwashed the Easterners into worshipping the (lack of) rules associated with the Western culture and society. East and its high moral values are belittled in comparison throughout the novel. This can be noticed in a multitude of characters and situations where the indigenous cultural and religious beliefs and values are shown to be regressive. An instance of this is when Ameena decides to wear hijab, Saira and their mother (who otherwise professes to be very religious and traditional) are not happy with Ameena's choice. Saira even wonders if Sakina will be made to cover her head by Ameena, when she is old enough. In the same way, Adeeba's rebellious life choices are celebrated. Her "success" at being a forebearer of "freedom" and "liberty", in the sense that these concepts are defined in the West, is appreciated in the novel. Her sister, Zahida, who is a traditional, modest, religious Muslim woman is shown to be backward and foolish for not breaking free of and instead accepting and embracing Eastern values. It is implied that she could have avoided her poor fate if she were a "modern" woman and followed Western ideology. Haji has clearly written this novel to appease the Western and Westernized local audience by putting forth the idea that Eastern women can achieve better and brighter lives if they shun the Eastern values and follow the leadership and ideology of the West. This is the justification Britain gave for its colonial rule. She claimed that the people of the East are backward and less intelligent so they must be taught and led by the White man. This mindset can be noticed in the characters of this novel too who have internalized the feelings of inferiority and think Western rule over the world is for the betterment of the ruled. East and Eastern values are incessantly shown to be a hurdle in the way of success, liberation and progress. The novel depicts a Eurocentric way of thinking in which good and bad is judged from subjective European standards. East and Easterners are bound to lose in this game. By depicting the lack of acceptance for homosexuality, nudity, alcohol, partying and illicit relationships in Eastern culture, it is implied that people from the East are intolerant and don't respect diversity and freedom of choice. Apparently, anyone who does not meet Western standards of morality is a prude. Even the practice of dancing is shown to be a sign of liberation and modernity multiple times in the narrative and the Eastern value of modesty is mocked. In short, everything associated with the East is presented as inferior and every Western practice including the social evils that are prevalent in the West are appreciated and seen as signs of modernity and



civilization. The chaos, glitz and glamour of Western life has been glorified in this postcolonial novel. The previous studies done on post-colonial literature of the sub-continent show a similar streak. The characters in many post-colonial novels consider it a source of pride to speak, dress and behave in a way like their former colonizers. That is why the phenomenon of hybridity and its elements as propounded by Bhabha have been the objective of many researchers working on post-colonial fiction. The present research has the same aim with the addition of linking it to the idea of continued Western hegemony or ideological control over their formerly colonized nations.

The real victory of colonizers is the conquest of the thought of the colonized peoples. They try to propagate the idea that cultural, religious, and physical traits of the colonized people are inferior, and hence they deserve to be subservient to the colonizers. This has resulted in mental slavery which is much more hazardous than physical occupation and control. The thought patterns of several characters which have already been discussed in detail as well as the viewpoint of the author indicate Western hegemony. What is needed is the liberation of the thought of the former colonial subjects from the chains of Western control. Many of the characters in the novel are fanatical fans of Western culture and have forgotten their Eastern roots and identity which has resulted in them becoming "almost the same, but not quite".

The Muslim immigrant families living in the West try to remain attached to their Eastern roots by a loose thread and while the elders are ambivalent in their attitude, most of the youth of these immigrant families tries to assimilate in the Western culture by mimicking their language, clothing and lifestyle. Born and raised by Muslim parents from Indo-Pak but deeply influenced by the Western culture, they are hybrids of East and West. Though brown physically, on the inside they have been whitewashed. Even the characters residing in Pakistan and India are deeply influenced by Western cultural invasion that accompanied colonial rule. The findings of most of the previous studies are similar. However, in the present research the researcher has linked the findings to the idea of hegemony or ideological control of the West over the people of the East. Everyone and everything from the East is judged against the rules postulated by the West. People from the East are considered 'others' and less human than the Westerners. They are perceived as less civilized and relatively irrational and therefore in need of the Western world to discipline



and lead them. Eastern values and traditions are depicted as inferior, and westernization is considered the yardstick of enlightenment and progress. While the previous studies analyzed hybridity, the contribution of the present researcher is to not only investigate the novel using Bhabha's theory but also to link it with the factor of Western ideological control whereby the Eastern population has internalized the views of the West and has started believing itself to be inferior.

The phenomenon of colonialism and its impacts are complex and puzzling. Analyses of literary works to reveal the impact of colonialism on a common man is of paramount importance if the effects of colonial rule on the lives of the residents of former colonies is to be fully grasped. The current research serves this very purpose and will be helpful in enlightening and broadening the mental horizons of students and teachers interested in postcolonial theory. It will help them fathom the corollaries resulting from the colonial rule of the British in different parts of the world, especially South-Asia, and critically analyse the phenomenon of westernization at the cost of Eastern traditions and values. A war between native and western culture can be observed in a multitude of postcolonial novels. The study of this scrimmage between the Eastern way of life and Western cultural invasion which has been initiated by the researcher can be explored in future research studies as well. The scholars need to find ways of liberating Eastern minds from ideological control of the West to counter and minimize the impact of imperialism for the true liberation of the sub-continent.

Conclusion

Employing a textual scrutiny of *The Writing on My Forehead* reveals that the elements of mimicry, ambivalence, unhomeliness, diaspora and othering can be found in multiple major and minor characters. Saira is the most prominent blend of East and West. She is born to Pakistani parents living in America. Her parents try to install Eastern values in her, but she is Western in her outlook which makes her a hybrid. Her decision to not get married, work as a journalist and travel to different parts of the world is a result of the impact of Western culture and ideology on her. Adeeba, Kasim, Shabana and Ameena are also hybrids of the two cultures. Their mimicry of their ex-colonial rulers and the ambivalent quality of their attitudes has been discussed. The phenomena of othering, unhomeliness and diaspora are also touched briefly. The effects of these



phenomena on various characters and their life choices are profound and has been highlighted. At the end, the findings have been linked to the continued Western hegemony over the East.

This study is very helpful in demonstrating the various impacts of colonialism on the people of the former British colonies. A study of this novel from post-colonial perspective has shed ample light on the effects of colonial rule on the lives of common men and women which will help students, teachers and future researchers who wish to study and understand the remnants of the practices of colonialism and imperialism and their effects after the end of the formal colonial rule.

Recommendations for further research

The researcher has limited the present research to only a few aspects of post-colonial theory. Other aspects like identity crisis, alienation, assimilation and othering can be taken up by future researchers to explore Haji's fiction. In addition to this, feminist theories can also be applied on the novel under discussion as it highlights feminist concerns too.

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