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Allegorizing Nation Building in Fiction: An Analysis of Mumtaz Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided*

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Abstract: *The present paper is a New Historicist analysis of Mumtaz Shahnawaz's novel The Heart Divided (1957). Keeping in view the theoretical postulates of Stephen Greenblatt, the paper analyzes the literary text in conjunction with the author's life and time to evaluate how the different prevailing political discourses impacted the text. During the turbulent times of the Partition of the Subcontinent, the significance of the social and political forces that prompted the author to write the novel cannot be denied. Shahnawaz herself was a political activist during the Independence Movement so she closely witnessed the process of nation building and the emergence of the concept of Two Nation Theory so she incorporates these details in her fictional work. As a New Historicist study, this paper assumes that the selected fictional text has been shaped by the time and place in which it was produced and that it reflects the time and place it is set so the study explores the cultural forces surrounding the text and infusing meaning to it.*

Key Words: New Historicism, Nation building, Fictionalization, Narrative, History

Introduction

Mumtaz Shahnawaz in her novel *The Heart Divided* (1957) narrativizes the "social and cultural forces" (Dobie, 2012) that helped shaping the new Muslim nation's contours in the Pre-Partitioned Subcontinent. The inhabitants of the Indian Subcontinent were living harmoniously as one nation before the Indian Muslims realized that they would not be able to enjoy the true perks of freedom if they continue to live with the Hindus as a religious minority. This realization was achieved as a result of multiple reasons in history that helped pave the way for dividing the people along religious lines. Although, Shahnawaz's novel has usually been neglected but it is a significant novel that "treats the Partition comprehensively" (Gundur, 2008). The text was written in the backdrop of Partition; a time when people were questioning about their rights and future status in the post- Partitioned India.

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Shahnawaz's novel is "one of the few responses in English fiction to the creation of Pakistan from the Muslim Indian point of view" (Rahman 2015). Mumtaz Shahnawaz was able to fictionalize the issues of Muslim identity and nationhood in the Subcontinent because she belonged to a family of political activists so she had personally witnessed the whole Partition saga. She was the eldest daughter of Sir Muhammad Shah Nawaz and was given the name of Mumtaz Jahan at the time of her birth on 14 October 1912. Shahnawaz was affectionately called "Tazi". Her father was member of the Legislative Assembly in Punjab. She belonged to a well-educated and westernized family in which women alongside men were not only given access to education but also participated in politics. At a time when most Indian women were not even allowed to step out of their homes, Shahnawaz got an education from Queen Mary College, Lahore. She passed her matriculation in 1928 and accompanied her parents to London in 1930. Her parents went to London to participate in the Round Table Conference, but this political activity of the parents gave an opportunity to their intelligent daughter and she published "a poem in *The Spectator* and met literary celebrities" (Rahman 2015). This interest in literary writings helped the author write her only novel later.

Mumtaz Shahnawaz belonged to a family of political activists so she could not stay away from the politics of the age for long and joined the All India Muslim League in 1942. She was in favor of Hindu-Muslim unity initially and also worked alongside the Congress Party. Shahnawaz was also "inclined to the socialist ideology" (Shahnawaz, 1957) and participated in relief work for the laborers and peasants. Shahnawaz went to "Behar when Hindu-Muslim riots broke out there in 1946, and helped the afflicted. In 1947, the League clashed with the Unionist Party government in Punjab and Mumtaz Shahnawaz was imprisoned" (Rahman, 2015). She did not stop her social work even after Partition and "founded the Women's Volunteer Service and helped evacuate the nuns of an American missionary convent at great personal risk" (Rahman, 2015). Shahnawaz's involvement in the labor movement and the women's movement continued for quite some time but her social work did not interrupt her passion for politics and she worked tirelessly to spread the message of her leader.

Mumtaz Shahnawaz was initially in favor of a joined country for Hindus and Muslims. Her family had close ties with the prominent Hindu leader Jawaharlal Nehru and she was greatly inspired by him. Under Nehru's influence she worked for the joint Nationalist cause and supported the Congress Party, but later on she became "disillusioned and joined Muslim League" (Shamsie, 2017). After joining the Muslim League, Shahnawaz worked day and night to spread its message across Subcontinent and helped her mother to organize different divisional and district level meetings. She died in 1948 in an air crash over Ireland while she was travelling to New York to "give talks on Pakistan, and to discuss the first draft of her novel with an American publisher" (Shamsie, 2017). Her novel was written between 1943 and 1948 but published posthumously by her family in 1957, since it is an unedited version so the draft has several typological errors. Mumtaz Shahnawaz has incorporated the diverse discourses related to the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent and has tried to justify the need for a separate homeland for the Muslims.

Conceptual Framework

This paper utilizes Stephen Greenblatt's theoretical postulates to analyze the historicity of Mumtaz Shahnawaz's novel *The Heart Divided.* Through the parallel reading of the fictional text alongside the socio-cultural and historical conditions of the time because this New Historicist study seeks to comprehend the relation of history to ideology and the fictional text. So this study gives equal weightage to both historical and literary texts and integrates them without discrimination because the New Historicists do not read "literature as the direct expression of otherwise forgotten mentalities, but rather as the record of submerged, semiconscious structures" (Gallagher & Greenblatt 2001). New Historicism emphasizes power structures, modes of elucidation and depictions, and issues of identity. For New Historicists "History is not expected to validate a text by providing facts that will prove the text's truth" (Dobie, 2012). A New Historicist tries to comprehend culture by analyzing the literary

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text, because for them "things that draw us to literature are often found in the nonliterary" (Gallagher & Greenblatt 2001), in other words they see literature "as an instrument of political awareness and a statement of ideology" (Dobie, 2012). Greenblatt defines the fictional text to be an ongoing negotiation with the existing discourses. With this perception the literary text becomes co participant in the complex historical discourses. Keeping in view these assumptions of New Historicism this study interprets Shahnawaz's novel by viewing it as part of the same intersection.

Research Objective

To explain how did socio-cultural powers shaped the process of nation-building in the Pre-Partition Subcontinent.

Research Question

How does Mumtaz Shahnawaz's novel *The Heart Divided* explain and comment on the disparate discourses concerning the process of nation-building in the Pre-Partitioned Subcontinent?

Analysis and Discussion

The selected fictional text is set in the Pre-Partition Subcontinent. This "intensely political book" (Shamsir, 2017) fictionalizes the Muslim perspective of the Partition. Shahnawaz skillfully incorporates the themes of "Partition, politics, literature, public service and women's emancipation" (Shamsie, 2017). Tariq Rahman considers it "the only major response to the events which created the two states of India and Pakistan" (2015). This political novel of Shahnawaz revolves around the political discourses of Hindus and Muslims during the Partition and explains the idea of renunciation of Hindu-Muslim unity. The author explains the idea through the plot in which there are characters belonging to different religions.

The novel narrates the story of two families; a Muslim family of Shiekhs and a Hindu family of Kauls. The author narrates the changing socio-political environment of the Subcontinent through different characters and situations. The author introduces the two families in the text:

In the days when Raja Ranjit singh ruled Punjab, there were two young nobles at this court, who were close friends. One was Sheikh Jamaluddin, a Muslim, whose family had migrated to Lahore from Multan, in the days of the Moghal Emperors: and the other was Diwan Kailash Nath Kaul, a Hindu Kashmiri Pandit. An ancestor of the Kauls had come down from Kashmir during the reign of the Emperor ShahJahan, and had taken up an appointment at the Moghul Court at Delhi. Later, he had been given an appointment at Lahore with a small jagir or estate near that town and the title of Diwan. (Shahnawaz, 1957)

The narrative follows a linear plot in which the author depicts each and every political and historical happening relevant to the meta narrative of the Muslims. Commenting on the Hindu-Muslim unity the author symbolically presents the bonding between the families of Shiekhs and Kauls. The author explains the whole history of the struggle of Independence through a long dialogue between the Hindu Kashmiri Pandit, Diwan Jawala Prashad, and his unnamed nephew who has recently returned from England after many years. Jawala Parshad presents the Hindu perspective of the struggle and relates the history in these words:

You want me to tell you all about the political events in the country while you have been away,…and so much has happened, that it is difficult to relate—but I'll try. Let me see, you left us two years ago, about a month after you left, the Indian National Congress held its session at Calcutta. At that time, there were two groups in the Congress, the more moderate element wanted to ask the Government to accept the constitution drafted by the Nehru Committee wherein an immediate grant of Dominion Status was asked for, and the other wished to press for complete Independence. (Shahnawaz, 1957)

Jawala Parsad explains the Hindu perspective but before he ends his narrative of the historical incidents of the past two years, his friend, sheikh Jamaluddin walks into his study and responds to his nephew's question about the current position of the Muslims. He explains, "the Nehru report was rejected by almost all Muslims, but Congress gave an ultimatum for its acceptance… and then you

went into the struggle alone… you had no pact with the League as in 1919" (Shahnawaz, 1957). The author explains this notion of renunciation of Hindu-Muslim unity through various textual strains.

The narrative moves forward through numerous plots in which the author explains that "honest Muslims and Hindus could be both for and against" (Rahman 2015) the idea of Partition. The romantic relationship between Habib and Mohini, and Zohra's propagation of a joint struggle of Hindus and Muslims all depicts the socio-political dynamics of multiple discourses of the time. Tariq Rahman criticizes Shahnawaz for excessive use of historical and political data and considers it a novel's structural flaw. He explains, "In *The Heart Divided,* the heart (India) is divided, but the division is not delineated with reference to the emotional lives of the characters as much as it is an authentic part of history, complete with dates and names" (2015). Tariq claims that the author is so much indulged in the authenticity of the narrative that it interrupts the fictional rhythm. However, Muneeza Shamsie thinks that the structural flaws of the text should be seen in the context of the author's untimely demise. He comments:

In any discussion on *The Heart Divided,* it is important to remember that Mumtaz Shahnawaz did not live long enough to work on her novel further, and the final form it would have taken remains in the realms of conjecture. The unevenness of structure and plot are certainly a great drawback but the novel is not without value. (Shamsie, 2017)

Though Mumtaz Shahnawaz basis her narrative on historical and political discourse but the text is obviously significant because Shahnawaz is a novelist and not a historian.

Mumtaz Shahnawaz's novel is a product of her age. She was born and brought up in British India where the rhetorics of freedom and liberty was common. The enlightened political leaders were first ambivalent about the British rule but the Muslim leaders realized with time that the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity would not be beneficial for the Muslims after the departure of the Britishers. The author tries to delineate the causes of Hindu-Muslim split.

The precise causes of this division are many and various. At various points, various academic and non-academic authorities have blamed, in turn, British's "Divide-and-Rule" policy, the intransigence of Hindu nationalist leaders, the personal and communal ambitions of the leaders of the Muslim League, the militancy… what is certain is that, in time, partition came to be a seismic event that completely transformed public and private life all over the subcontinent. (Raychaudhuri, 2019)

Amongst these numerous discourses of the causes of division, Shahnawaz's perception is formed because she depicts her world view in the fictional narrative that was influenced by her exposure to the British system of education and modern political philosophies. Her nationalism and "religio-political sense" (Rahman 2015) was influenced by "liberal-humanitarian rather than fundamental Muslim interpretations of the world" (Rahman, 2015). She incorporates this knowledge in the fictional text even her mother emphasizes the socio-political content of her fiction and says that "Tazi [Mumtaz] had been writing a book tracing the socio-political changes in the subcontinent from 1932 to 1942 in the form of a novel" (Shahnawaz, J, 2002). According to Muneeza Shamsie, "*The Heart Divided* provided a first-hand account of the Independence Movement and the Pakistan Movement" (2017). The novel narrates the whole history and struggle of the people of Subcontinent but does not comment on the Partition riots.

The author only propagates the meta narrative of the nation and explains the history of struggle, how Hindus and Muslims struggled conjointly and why Muslims needed to part their ways. Shahnawaz's perspective of Partition is privileged and nationalistic because she belonged to the advantaged social class. The love story of Mohini and Habib symbolically represents the idea of the probable future of Hindu-Muslim unity. Both Mohini and Habib "believe in winning Independence for India and in Hindu-Muslim Unity" (Rahman 2015). This relationship flourishes in the beginning, both the lovers hope that they will be able to win social acceptance despite difference

of religion and will be able to marry and spend their lives together but "Unfortunately the marriage cannot possibly take place because it is against the religious prejudices of both the families" (Rahman, 2015). Shahnawaz explains how both the Shiekh and Kaul family do not agree to the idea of marriage and at the end both the lovers alienated. Tariq Rahman reads this as "a symbol of the estrangement of the Hindus and the Muslims in the political sphere" (2015). This failure of the individual effort of union symbolically represents the collective effort of the two nations to struggle conjointly.

The other important fictional character who is in favor of a joint political effort of Hindus and Muslims is Zohra. In the initial chapters of the novel she is an ardent believer of Hindi-Muslim unity and argues with her father that both the nations should struggle conjointly but her father explains the reason of split to her. He explains, "The unity forged in battle began to break-down. Hindus, who were still educationally and politically ahead of us, began to want all the power for themselves and to grudge their share to the Muslims" (Shahnawaz, 1957). The novel presents the Pre-Partition political discourses through characters' dialogues. The narrative gradually unfolds the different political discourses to explain why Muslims abandoned the idea of joint struggle. Commenting on the political content of the text Muneeza Shamsie notes that Shahnawaz was a political activist in the Independence struggle, who was first a member of the Congress Party, and later of the Muslim League and this diverse experience gave her access to multiple discourses which she has used in her novel. Shamsie says that the author "translated all this into *The Heart Divided* which portrays the complex events leading up to the demand for Pakistan" (2017).

Zohra who strongly believes in the notion of Hindu-Muslim unity gets disillusioned with the idea and by the end of the text tells her beloved Ahmed, "Oh, Ahmed, it has come into everything, just everything, the hatred and the division" (Shahnawaz, 1957). Although she was a proponent of homogenous Indian nationalism but towards the end of the text she also seems questioning the notion. Consequently, Shahnawaz is able to give the reader a peep into the diverging political discourses of her time. The characters like Zohra display the different discourses within the Muslim community and how all of them were diverted towards the similar point. Shahnawaz's novel is in conversation with the contemporary ideologies and the time and constantly negotiates jostling of contesting discourses.

Conclusion

Mumtaz Shahnawaz incorporates the socio-political issues of her time in her fictional works and creates characters and settings based on actual people and places. She propagates the idea of a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims; an idea that was very much in the air at the time she was writing the novel. This New Historicist study of Shahnawaz's fictional text displays the author's pluralistic perspective in delineating the historical events, though the main focus of her text remains the Muslim perspective of the Partition.

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