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FEELING OF 'UNHOMELINESS' OWING TO DYING ARTS AND CHANGING CULTURE IN MUSHARRAF ALI FAROOQI'S BETWEEN CLAY AND DUST

Hannia Javaid^{1*}

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, University of the Punjab.

Article Info

*Corresponding Author

Email Id: hanniajavaid170@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper explores how the arts patronized by Nawabs, such as Pehalwani and kotha culture have declined after the traumatic episode of partition and how this decline has influenced the life of those who were deeply connected with these forms of performing arts. The theoretical framework that has been used to explain the feeling of unease brought to the members of the older generation by cultural changes, is Homi K. Bhabha's theory of homely/unhomely, from his article "The World and the Home". This theory explains how things/situations/places which were previously familiar to the individuals have become unfamiliar and uncomfortable for the people. The essay proposes that in the novel *Between Clay and Dust*, the partition of the subcontinent is shown as having caused significant changes in culture, traditions, attitudes and values, and this has made people feel as if they no longer belong to this place, which has resulted in a feeling of unhomeliness in their own land and arts. Gohar Jan no longer feels harmony or consolation in her art because people no longer visit the Kothas and Ustad Ramzi feels unfamiliar in this land because the splendor and glory his art once had is longer there and great pehalwans like his ancestors are not alive. The younger generation has failed to comprehend and later deliver the true essence of Pehalwani, this makes Ustad Ramzi a stranger in his own land.

Keywords

Between Clay and Dust, Musharraf Ali Farooqi, Post-partition, culture, dying arts, Bhabha, homely, uncomely.

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1. Introduction

August 1947 was not only made an impact on geopolitics and the Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent but it also on the cultural scene and arts of the newly born countries. Though many regions in both countries shared the same traditions, values, cuisine, language and customs, nonetheless these areas were heavily affected by the Partition. Musharraf Ali Farooqi's novel *Between Clay and Dust* deals with the tension generated between generations because of the shift in values and culture which was brought about by the result of Partition.

Many artists, writers and poets of the subcontinent who wrote after Partition worked upon the theme of the trauma experienced by people caught up in this catastrophic event.

Though Musharraf Ali Farooqi was born after the Partition, being a part of a divided country, he could not escape it as a leitmotif in his writings. His novel discusses how the Partition changed not only the map of the subcontinent, but also the mindset of the people. Partition not only mattered to those who had to physically move and migrate with the new changes, but those who did not physically migrate too. Partition was not as simple as just separating and packing off Hindus and Muslims to their new lands, and forming a boundary between two places. Equally significant, there was a symbolic partition between the old and new generation, an upheaval of the passion and emotions that the older generation held close to their heart.

Farooqi's novel discusses how partition caused 'dying' of certain arts, particularly Pehelwani and courtesan's culture. This research paper will explore how partition caused a change in the mindset of new generation which was totally different for the older generation. It was different to the extent that the members of older generation started feeling uncomfortable in their own place. The Homi K. Bhabha's theory of homely/unhomely, developed in his article 'The World and the Home.' Bhabha took this theory from Freud's concept of Heimlich and Unheimlich. (Freud et al. 1976).

In this novel, the changed culture and younger generations' attitude towards art and work etiquette in general is what makes the older generation uncanny not only in their land but

also in their beloved arts which are now dying because of Partition.

About *Between Clay and Dust*, Musharraf Ali Farooqi says that he has never visited an akhara in his real life or spoken to a pehalwan. It is hard to believe that because he gives such vivid and elaborate description about akhara, its customs and traditions of pehalwans. He attributes his knowledge and information regarding Pehalwani to the books he has read about them (Murad 2012).

This novel is about a tawaif named Gohar Jan and pahalwan Ustad Ramzi who excelled in their arts in their prime. But now their arts are diminishing and no longer hold the glory they once did. The setting of the novel is in a city in post-partition times. However, it is not known whether the city is in Pakistan or in India and that was done on purpose by the author. He says that he did not want to "portray the boundaries of any particular nation-state, either Pakistan or India". Farooqi says that this novel is not about any country, it is about the 'culture' that these two countries share. This book is about how partition was herald of end to some arts and the people attached to it (Najar 2012). The novel discusses the conflicts that arise due to generation gap and difference in work ethics between Ustad Ramzi and his brother Tamami. Ustad Ramzi sticks to the rules of the akhara and pehelwani set by his ancestors whereas Tamami wants a shortcut to success. On the other hand, Gohar Jan, a beautiful courtesan witnesses the demise of kotha culture and accepts the fate of her failing profession without fighting.

Homi Bhabha writes in "The World and the Home", that unhomely does not mean that the individual is 'homeless'. Rather this unhomely feeling has more to do with "uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation" as well as "cultural relocations". Bhabha has extended the concept of Freud's concept of Heimlich and Unheimlich and applied it to post-colonial perspective. Bhabha writes that the prefix with the word unheimlich suggests that it was once Heimlich, 'the familiar home-like feeling'. It is the 'estranged' feeling that one feels while encountering something that one is accustomed to before. Bhabha says that uncanny is the repression of some truth that has now turned 'foreign'. Bhabha places unhomely as a distinctly "post-colonial space".

(Bhabha 1992). Freud derived a connection between the German adjective *Heimlich* and its antonym *Unheimlich* which has negative connotation attached to it (uncanny). For Freud, *Unheimlich* is the “estranged familiar”. That being said, the concept is that something familiar now seems strange and uncanny. In reality, uncanny is nothing new or ‘alien’ to the individual, but it is something which was known/familiar which has now become alienated

Justin D. Edwards (2008) in his book *Postcolonial Literature* applies the concept of Bhabha’s *homely/unhomely* to a reading of Shani Mootoo’s novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996). In this novel, the main character Mala is oppressed by her father Chandin. She is driven mad by his abuse and the constraints he places on her. He has fenced his house with a “chicken wire” and he regulates the movement of his two daughters. He guards them as they bathe in an ‘outdoor bathroom’ and makes each child sleep on his either side. Hence, he has confined them to a house and this house shifts from being a homely place to an unhomely place. This place though very familiar, her father’s house could have been a place where Mala gained a sense of identity, attachment and security, becomes a threatening place for her.

Edwards also explains the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison in the light of *homely/unhomely*. This novel is about an African slave named Sethe. Sethe is not only tortured by the ghost of her daughter beloved but the bruises left by extreme racial abuse never heal. The presence of the ghost in the novel symbolizes both trauma of the past and healing. Things have gotten better at the place where Seth is living, however she is still haunted by previous racial experiences. According to Bhabha, there is a liminal space between ‘competing histories’, in Sethe’s case, living at a home yet finding it unhomely.

Allen et al (2012) discussed Bhabha’s concept in the context of 1947 Subcontinent Partition. They write that the concept of being at “homely” home was “utopian” for the people going through political and geographical changes during partition. The unhomely aspect of a place or an object uncovers “forgotten but familiar strangeness of home as a site that elicits enigmatic longing” (page). It can also be said that unhomely is the longing of

something now absent. Partition brought with it major changes which disappointed the masses, which contrasts with what many history books portray. People could not easily bear the idea of migration and displacement from homes to new homes in new land. Even after ‘settling’ in homes, they experienced feelings of disfamiliarity with the place, the kind of feeling a guest has a host’s house. The Partition refugees invent new selves and “multiple subjectivities” which would feel home at some places and not at others.

The arts discussed in this novel also could not save themselves from the rapid changes accompanying partition. Shamsie (2012) writes in “Book Review: Between Clay and Dust.” that before partition there was a hierarchy of arts which were patronized by the elites and the Nawabs. However, with time, when they princely states were ruined and their Nawabs fled, the survival of these arts became quite difficult since there was no one to not only fund these performing arts but also there was no one who appreciated the essence of these arts. Palawani and tawaif culture hence deteriorated.

Sharar as cited in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives Includes CD* says that it was courtesans who kept the high culture of Lucknow alive. He says that courtesans played a fundamental role in promoting Kathak dance and Hindustani music in Lucknow. They were cultured and there was a marked difference between them and prostitutes, who did not possess any artistic talents. There were various types of courtesans, those who lived as wives, some who performed at religious events and were called *devadasi*, but the one discussed in the novel is *ganika*, a “secular courtesan” who was associated with the Royal court. (Feldman & Gordon 2006).

The upper-class Muslim men of nineteenth century took pride in visiting the *Kothas* to listen to *ghazals* and music by *tawaifs*. Apart from this, they also used to witness the traditional dance performances by *tawaifs*. They were considered an important part of cultural practice. Apart from performing in their own *Kothas*, sometimes they were also invited to the homes of these rich men to perform. (Myrsiades & McGuire 1995).

Though a severe blow to these arts was given after partition however, the courtesan community did not only witness its decline.

Even before, after the arrival of the Britishers in the subcontinent, these arts showed slight decline since the Mughal emperors' 'courts disbanded'. As Henderson (2002) writes that when Britishers came in 1857, many courtesans in Lucknow who were renowned for their dance and music, suffered. Some of the courtesans' property was also seized. However things did not change significantly in Princely states and some British took over the control of these arts.

Writing about the art of Pehalwani in the subcontinent, Shakoor (2017) asserts in his article "Basant and Pehalwani: Dying Cultural Traditions of Punjab (A Case Study of Lahore)" that pehalwans were considered to be embodiment of great health and talks about the demise of this art:

"The rulers of states patroned Pehalwani not only for their entertainment but they backed this precious cultural tradition for the reason that it highlighted their authority and as it nurtured a symbol of concord among the populace... After the partition, rulers of the states were given the option to choose either India or Pakistan. In the process of allegiance, most of the states lost their independent status and economic deprivation was the order of the day, so they stopped sponsoring the pehalwans."

In the subcontinent, Pehalwans used to practice their art in special pits called Akharas and pehalwans were admired for their sound body as well as a sound mind because in those days Indians laid great emphasis on good health. Pehalwans were given training under their gurus. Shakoor further writes that Lahore was the hub of pehalwans and people from different places came to witness their art. Before partition there were about three hundred Akharas, but after partition only thirty of them remained functional. Because pehalwans were not given due importance and revenue, most of them left this profession, hence causing a steep drop in their number.

Between Clay and Dust presents its readers with two characters who are the heads of their respective arts. The novel also presents us with two places vital for the protagonists; the Akhara and the Kotha and shows how the characters have bound their lives with their arts and their dedication does not allow them to change the principles associated with it.

The novel begins by giving a description of the place after it "time's proclivity for change" and the "ravaging winds of Partition". (Farooqi 9). The place being described seems like a ruin and that is exactly what partition did to the geography, mentality and culture of subcontinent. There is a line in the text that has symbolic connotations:

"Links binding old and new neighborhoods were either never formed or broken at the start" (Farooqi 9).

This line is symbolic of the tensed ties between older and younger generation. It also signifies that the new traditions forming as a result of partition cannot be linked with the old traditional beliefs and hence, cannot provide a homely feeling to the people who held fast to their customary beliefs. This is quite apparent in the relationship between the two brothers Ustad Ramzi and Tamami who share a completely different set of values. Farooqi writes that "nobody expected that in Partition's wake would follow a slow disintegration of values". (pg. 10). This disintegration of values would prove suffocating for those who practiced their beliefs religiously and for whom strict code of morality mattered a lot. But there is a difference between how the members of older generation take it-while Ustad Ramzi finds it hard to accept the new changes brought about by partition in culture, Gohar Jan quietly submits to her fate rather than fighting it.

Gohar Jan is a beautiful tawaif with "hazel green eyes" (Farooqi 27) who conducted mehfilis in her Kotha. But partition proved to be disastrous for herself and her art just like it proved to be devastating for Pehalwani. The elite who frequented to these places stopped coming and hence mehfilis declined and music rooms became silent. Farooqi writes that "The sudden and radical turnabout in life after partition had created a deep feeling of uncertainty." (Farooqi 27).

Gohar Jan goes through undergoes a transition from being homely at her kotha and art to feeling unhomely. In the novel, her Kotha, which is home for her, goes from having furniture and nayikas to being an empty place. The building itself goes through a drastic change rendering it unhomely for Gohar Jan. In order to maintain the glory that her art once had, Gohar Jan even sold her jewelry but all in vain. Later she had to sell half of the furniture

of her kotha in order to survive and locked all the rooms so that visitors could not see the empty rooms and “bare walls” (Farooqi 55). The satisfaction she found in her art also started to disappear and make her feel unhomey at it and it was “being replaced with anxiety.” (Farooqi 74). The glamorous life of kotha had given her a sense of purpose in life which was now being lost and “She felt helpless in quelling the feeling of loss that grew inside her.” (Farooqi 75)

For Gohar Jan, her home was kotha and its deterioration brought a feeling of insecurity and unhomeliness in her own kotha. Though, according to the text she did not migrate during partition. She lived in the same kotha as before and did not give it up, yet she felt a sense of distance at her home which migrants experienced. Gohar Jan started feeling gloomy and the place she called her kotha started to feel unfamiliar at it as it is written “She felt restive and disoriented. Sometimes the walls, the furniture, even the Music Room where she had performed for decades, appeared unfamiliar.” (Farooqi 75). The things that brought peace and satisfaction to her such as her daily recitals now started becoming unfamiliar to her. Many days after she had ended conducting mehfil at her place, Ustad Ramzi came to her and became her sole audience. She played the Sitar for him and felt a sense of familiarity as if she found something that had been lost previously and “she felt at home.” (Farooqi 80).

The falling of “one of the awnings” (Farooqi 106) of her Kotha holds a symbolic significance. The physical degeneration of the kotha symbolizes how her feeling of homeliness was also fading and sinking just like the building. It also symbolizes the fall of values that people held before Partition and one such example is that of Maulvi Hidayatullah’s pupil Yameen. These two characters also represent the stark difference of values and morals between generations that partition had brought. Though Maulvi Hidayatullah did not approve of tawaifs’ culture, he always accepted Gohar Jan’s donations for the repair or construction of mosques. Whereas, Yameen, did not approve of tawaifs using the water from the ablution center. Moreover, he did not accept donations from Gohar Jan and she felt “humiliated” (Farooqi 121) but she remained adamant that

she wanted to help the mosque anonymously. This shows how values differed in post partition subcontinent. Moreover, it also exposes the hypocrisy of people, for though Gohar Jan is a tawaif, yet she feels compelled to help in religious affairs whereas Yameen, being a maulvi holds bias and hatred towards tawaifs and considers himself the upholder of religion. The very same land, which once used to have kind and generous people who held concrete values and principles, was now devoid of that homely feeling. These cultural changes made the very same place unfamiliar to Gohar Jan as well as Ustad Ramzi who are principled, cultured and dedicated to their respective fields.

Ustad Ramzi, is a distinguished pehalwan, “a man of frugal speech and austere habits” (Farooqi 12) who was given the prestigious title of Ustaad-e-Zaman for his dedication to his field. Every day he gets up early in the morning and follows a strict routine that consists of “smoothing the akhara clay” (Farooqi 17), exercising and visiting the graveyard where his ancestors were buried. But “recently, Ustad Ramzi’s world had been shaken” (Farooqi 13) because the nawabs who patronized these arts had fled as their states were obliterated. This brought about uncertainty regarding future for those for whom art was a matter of life and death. And in the “eyes and minds of people the pahalwan’s art and his world were doomed”. (Farooqi 15).

In contrast to Ustad Ramzi “who took a nobler view of his art” (Farooqi 17), is his brother Tamami who linked himself to this field only because of ancestry and the chances of fame it would bring to him. There is a stark contrast between the two brothers who are representative of their generations. There is a significant lack of values in Tamami who does not bother to abide by the sacred guidelines related to the akhara. Despite many efforts of Ustad Ramzi, he could not return the glory to Pehalwani that it once held.

For Ustad Ramzi his niche is his art and he is an ardent devotee of its sacred rituals. Ustad Ramzi felt at home and found his peace in the rituals related to Pehalwani he performed as it is quoted in the novel:

“He always experienced a deep sense of harmony in that place.” (Farooqi 15)

But owing to his aging, reluctantly he has to give some amount of control to his brother Tamami too. And once he starts to share some part of his symbolic home with Tamami, he feels a sense of loss or estrangement.

“From the day he made the announcement he knew that he would begin to lose his grip on the akhara affairs which he had run unchallenged for many years”. (Farooqi 19).

This is the point from where Ustad Ramzi’s world starts crumbling down. His ailing health, Tamami’s lack of dedication, and new cultural changes made Ustad Ramzi feel alienated in his own niche. When he shared his authority with Tamami, trainees did not come to akhara on time or sometimes they would do nothing since no duty was allotted to them by Tamami. His feeling of despondency is well reflected in the text where he begins to feel helpless because he is not getting accustomed to the new changes. Thus we read:

“Ustad Ramzi’s inability to come to terms with this predicament, and the growing dread that he would now be at the mercy of others in matters which concerned him dearly, frequently made him despondent.” (Farooqi 25)

This shows us how Ustad Ramzi experiences the estranged feeling that Bhabha talks about. Once a head of his clan, Ustad Ramzi is finding it difficult to survive in his own art. Once he was a master of Pehalwani who knew its essence as well as its practice. But now his age and transitions in culture make him feel alien in his own art. Like Gohar Jan, he remained true to it, but art gave him no consolation. Tamami symbolizes impurity for Ustad Ramzi because it is after his entry into pahalwan’s domain that Ustad Ramzi begins to feel uncomfortable and “Tamami’s presence began to annoy him.” (Farooqi 40)

Tamami is only after the title of Ustaad-e-Zaman and physical aspect of Pehalwani whereas according to Ustad Ramzi Pehalwani goes beyond bodily fitness. Tamami, who belongs to a younger generation is oblivious to the true spirit of Pehalwani. He is impulsive, aggressive, rash and spontaneous as opposed to Ustad Ramzi who depicts the qualities of a true pahalwan was annoyed by Tamami’s “fickle nature and heedless ways” (pg. 25). When Tamami makes the mistake of inviting Imama for a round of bout, Ustad Ramzi gets furious as his ‘home’ (art) is being

invaded by Tamami in the form of erroneous decisions. This threatened Ustad Ramzi and he says that “It is not your place. I am the head of the clan. Never again interfere in matters that are my responsibility. I am not dead yet.” (Farooqi 50)

As if Tamami was not enough for making things bitter, Gulab Deen came to the scene to make things worse. The presence of Gulab Deen the “sports promoter” (Farooqi 51) symbolizes the cultural changes brought with partition which polluted Ustad Ramzi’s art. Gulab Deen was responsible for publicizing events. He was concerned with the monetary gains and manipulated things to fit his purpose. He is somewhat similar to Iago from Othello who manipulated to get personal benefits. Gulab Deen plays a significant role in reducing Pehalwani to mere an entertainment show rather than a style of life which it used to be. “Promoters were a new phenomenon in the sports.” (Farooqi 52).

Gulab Deen gave Ustad Ramzi and Tamami the suggestion of having a fixed bout which was totally against the beliefs of Ustad Ramzi and he rebuked him by saying that he does not need money and that the pahalwans of his clan never participated in fixed bouts. The art which was so dear to him, was now being reduced to entertainment purposes only and he knew that this art would soon die since there was no one worthy of carrying the legacy of this art. He had tried himself to uphold the honor alone but had failed because of poor health and during his bout with Imama, he “clearly saw the end of his reign”. (Farooqi 61). It is observed that the new changes brought by his health, Tamami’s attitude, Gulab Deen’s selfishness make him feel threatened in his own niche as he is losing grip of it. At the end of the novel, when heavy rains flood the ancestral graveyard, he goes to complain to the municipality office with his medals and tells the director about his medals and honorable ancestry, and tells him his issue. The director does not take him seriously, which shocks Ustad Ramzi since he is not treated properly according to his high position. He feels constricted in his own land and his art failed to serve him. The new changes coming to subcontinent made him feel strange and unhomely in his own country and hence this resulted in a longing for the past.

The type of nostalgia observed in this novel can also be seen in *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali. In that novel characters are seen remembering their glorified Mughal past. The entry of British changes the culture of Delhi significantly. Similarly, their departure as well as partition further takes a toll on culture and traditional values. Riaz and Khan (2015) write that Ahmed Ali has given a "contrast" between how things were in the past and how they are now. Arrival of British called for great changes and elder generation was struggling with the new ways of life as well as rebelling it whereas the new generation did not have much problem adapting to new changes. One clear example of this is Asghar's marriage, who forces his parents to give him consent to marry Bilquees. Earlier marriages were planned by the consent of elders in family but the trend can be seen changing. Similarly, in the novel *Between Clay and Dust*, there is a marked difference between older and younger generation and between those who accepted new changes and those who did not.

The post partition changes creeps characters' skin and there is no way they can reverse the effects. The damage has been done. The older generation cannot help feeling estranged and unfamiliar in their own homes. The unhomely that Bhabha talks about is the feeling similar to 'defamiliarization'. A familiar thing or concept is made or presented in such a way that the familiar objects starts losing its connection with the individual and appears strange. This unfamiliar feeling can also take up the form of 'nostalgia' that strikes a person when encountering something that was previously there but not anymore. If we view it this way then it is a feeling of loss-loss of what was once homely-familiar. The characters of older generation of this novel experience a sense of loss of feeling of homeliness not only in their arts but also in their lands.

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