A Study Of Another Gulmohar Tree As Writing Back To The Empire: A Literary And Linguistic Analysis

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Abstract: Human subconscious is silent but active contributor in the process of communication. Long term memories influence the thought processing in the contemporary cognitive as well as psychological orientation for transmission or reception of ideas. Same is reflected in the literature produced by creative human minds. The sole objective of this research is to examine the art of writing back to the empire in non-native English postcolonial literary writings. In this regard, novel, Another Gulmohar Tree has been targeted and analyzed through Bhabha’s (1994) notions of ambivalence and unhomeliness. The theory presented by Bhabha (1994) in his book The Location of Culture provides the model on which this research is framed. In particular, Bhabha’s concept of hybridity has been taken as an analytical framework for this study. This bidirectional concept of ambivalence and unhomeliness facilitates in understanding the experiences of two major characters, Usman and Lydia in Another Gulmohar Tree. The study concludes that the novel is a true example of writing back to the empire and it is explicitly reflected in the major characters through two dominant themes of ambivalence and homeliness.

Keywords: study, writing back, empire, literary, linguistic

1. Introduction

This study examines the art of writing back to the empire in non-native post-colonial literary writings by analyzing the novel Another Gulmohar Tree through Bhabha’s (1994) notions of ambivalence and unhomeliness. The word post-colonial is used to encompass the entire culture that was influenced through the process of imperialism since the beginning of colonization to the present time. Having control and power over language is the predominant characteristic of imperial domination. The British imperialism sets a ‘standard’ variety of the English language as the model to follow, and considers all the other varieties of English as impure. In the wake of this, the
nonnative postcolonial writers are producing English literary writings which can be seen as the cultural write back to resist the hegemony of the imperialist discourse (Aschcroft, 2002, p.7). Another name for this is ‘Commonwealth Literature,' a term that was used for the first time by literary critics in the 1950s to describe global literatures in English written by authors from former colonial countries (MacLeod, 2000, p.12). It has been argued by cultural theorists and literary critics like Bhabha and Ashcroft that since text and language plays a central role in the construction of the discourse of the empire therefore text, language (in our case English) and literary fiction are deemed as central tools in the historical reconstruction of national narratives among the formerly colonized peoples.

The world in which we live today is a borderless world. It has become a global village. The distance among the people have squeezed virtually multiple time. People are immigrating to other countries, at a very fast rate, making possible a constant diffusion of language, race, and culture. In this scenario, it is but normal that writers choose to use literature as a tool to express and discuss the dilemma and plight of the people who have to make important decisions regarding their motherland and their adopted land. This can be seen in the work of Aamer Hussein, who is a Pakistani author and has experienced migration to England. As is evidenced by his novel Another Gulmohar Tree, Hussein is indeed one of those authors who has effectively used literature as a medium to address the alienation and unhomeliness that people face across the world. This novel is also a perfect example for the study of ambivalence as it contains two main characters Usman and Lydia that are caught between two different cultures and have to make crucial choices with regard to the way they would like to live their future life.

Applying Bhabha’s (1994) notions of ambivalence and unhomeliness, this study examines how the writer writes back to the empire using the techniques of ambivalence and unhomeliness in the novel Another Gulmohar Tree.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How does the writer use the techniques of ambivalence and unhomeliness to write back to the empire?
2. What are the linguistic choices for the literary style of writing back to the empire?

2. Literature Review

Bhabha’s critical approach emerging chiefly through the Location of Culture (1994) has provided the undercurrent for this research work as the researchers intend to apply Bhabha’s notions of ambivalence and unhomeliness. In The Location of Culture, Bhabha comments on hybridity as a moment “when other denied knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority- its rule of recognition,” (Bhabha, 1994). He takes hybridity as ‘third space’ which ‘leads to ambivalence’ (Bhabha, 1991). It is not the consequence of one or more cultural forms thrust together. It is much more than simple mixture of cultures: it is not the consequence of
dialectal sublation which implies the synthesis of thesis and antithesis. It is a place of productivity where something starts showing its presence and so it should be celebrated.

Bhabha’s version of cultural hybridity and ambivalence is more comprehensive wider and applicable than most of the post-colonial thinkers. Shifting hybridity from its racial connotation to the semiotic field of culture he pinpoints its creativity. He believes that post-colonial condition requires novel concepts and formulations to capture the increasingly complex world we live in. He has demonstrated that the third space had been and could be very useful in future for the postcolonial subjects. In the Location of Culture (1994) he comments on hybridity as a moment when other denied forms of knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority (Bhabha, 1991). In an interview titled Third Space he says that for him the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to him is the ‘third space’ which leads to ambivalence’.

The emergence of some fixed form of culture is not possible. Bhabha’s term implies that there is no such thing as purity of culture. Conclusively post-colonial world is all about impurity or hybridity of cultures. According to Bhabha when two or more cultures come along, a space is created, which he termed as “third space of enunciation” (Bhabha, 1994). Cultural identity is formed in this contradictory and ambivalent space. He insists more on Hybridity’s on going processes than mere hybridity. The third space breaks open the fixity of cultures, brings diversity to enrich it further and allows to construct and contest identities in an unending process. Furthermore, in his essay, however, Bhabha clarifies that the ‘unhomely’ is not a concept that is restricted to a condition that is either colonial or post-colonial. Rather, it has a “resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate powers of cultural difference in a range of trans-historical sites/historical conditions and social contradictions” (Bhabha 1992, p.142). In the enlightening moment of unhomeliness, an individual/character realizes (with a sense of shock) that a ‘home’ is not limited to the confinement of the four surrounding walls; it extends way beyond the physical or geographical boundaries into the world. As Bhabha writes beautifully in his book, unhomely subjects “inhabit the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence ... bridg[es] the home and the world” (Bhabha 1994, p.19).

Hybridity is the third space which leads to ambivalence (Bhabha, 1991). Ambivalence is a word that was initially coined in psychoanalysis that describes frequent oscillation between desiring a certain thing and at the same time having desire for its opposite (Young, 1995). Ambivalence of thought has existed among humans right from the beginning of the world (Weisbrode, 2012). The notion of ambivalence was found in Shakespeare’s Hamlet and it can be seen even more in the postcolonial characters of the modern day. People from all over the world are immigrating to various parts of the world subsequently resulting into an incessant sharing of culture and language based ideologies. Therefore, writers write literary texts to represent the dilemma and indecisiveness of the immigrants who come across novel situations in the foreign land and need to make important choices regarding their future. This dilemma is portrayed very skillfully in Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel An American Brat and it is quite evident that Sidhwa has used literature very effectively to highlight the problems of those people who leave their own country for better
prospects and move to a foreign land. It is important to mention here that Sidhwa is a Pakistani writer who herself experienced immigration dilemmas in USA (Gul, Noor, & Kaur, 2016). In Sidhwa’s novel An American Brat, the protagonist Feroza faces identity crisis. Feroza is a Pakistani girl who migrates to America in her youth. As Feroza begins to socialize with the natives of the foreign land, she starts experiencing emotions of self-contradiction. When she goes out on parties with Jo and enjoys her time with different boys, she experiences ambivalence. At first, feelings of guilt overtake her and she wonders and fears how her family would respond to such behavior. However, simultaneously she is ruled by feelings of astounding independence and envisions a life in America that is without any restraints for young people (Gul, Noor, & Kaur, 2016). “So the most basic type of ambivalence originates with desire, namely in the contradiction between the heart and the head” (Weisbrode, 2012, p. 5).

Similarly, in Emecheta’s (1994) novel Kehinde the protagonist spends 18 years in England but she still feels that her only home is Nigeria to whom she truly belongs to. She thinks about returning home and reflects on her personality thinking that there has not been a considerable change in her in all the years that she has lived in London. Further in the novel her ambivalence is again seen when she does not feel herself at home while living in her home country Nigeria. The character, Kehinde feels herself like a ghost in her hometown where she had spent her childhood and early years of life. She finds peace neither in London nor in her own country and the ambivalence does not let her settle on either side of the border (Bivan, Iwoketok, & Agye, 2018).

In the novel Seasons of Migration to the North, Mustafa who is an Arab goes to different countries of Europe and spends time in England, Germany, Denmark and France. He moves to Europe to take revenge from the colonizers as he blames the colonizers for stealing his people’s culture, land and their distinctiveness as well as identity. Although, he plans to take revenge yet in trying to achieve his purpose, he is greatly influenced by their ways and manners of life. Unconsciously, he becomes a part of their culture as he spends a hybrid life in the European culture for a significant period of time. He spends time with European women and uses them as a tool to payback the colonizers but this only results in destroying his own identity. He no longer remains attached to his past and the image of his dear mother evades from his mind. In fact, when he returns to his country he fails to adjust in his own homeland and recalls his life in Europe (Zohdi, 2018).

It is also important to note that ambivalence in not always limited to the relationship between the colonizer and colonized. It may arise when a person migrates to any foreign country and comes into contact with the conditions, beliefs and ways of living prevailing in that country. “In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself” (Fanon, 1986, p. 146). According to Alghamdi (2011), the dilemma of the contact between home and the other (Other) is universal and deep. Said (1993) in his book Culture and Imperialism writes, “I grew up as an Arab with a Western education. Ever since I can remember, I have felt that I belonged to both worlds, without being completely of either one or the other” (p. xxvi). This is the result of transculturation which involves the influence of more than one cultures. Transculturation represents mutual influences of cultures which come into contact with each other often in extremely dissimilar relations of superiority and subservience.
such as, imperialism, slavery or their by-products which can be found all over the world today (Pratt, 1992). Ethnographers have used this term to illustrate the way subalterns and minority groups adopt and assimilate cultural practices transferred to them by the parent states of the colonies or by a superior group (Taussig, 1993). Home is a contested idea and it can no longer be applied only to specific cultures (Alghamdi, 2011). As Marrouchi claims “a space of multiple allegiances” which cannot be easily resolved or made harmonious but, in fact, invokes irreconcilable differences of locations (Marrouchi, 1998, p. 209).

3. Theoretical Framework

The notion of ‘unhomely’ and ‘ambivalence’ presented by Bhabha (1994) in his book The Location of Culture provides the framework on which this research is based. The emergence of non-native varieties of English and Literature has often been seen as the cultural write back to resist the hegemony of the dominant culture and the imperialist discourse. In this context, the entire postcolonial diasporic literature exhibits mixed feelings of contrast that marks the lives of migrants. Love-hate relationships, contradictions between ‘self’ and ‘other’ native-alien clash of cultures, hybridity, ambivalence and unhomeliness prevail throughout in the novels of non-native postcolonial English literature. Here, the study discusses the relevance of Bhabha’s perception to understand the typical postcolonial ambivalence and unhomeliness which gets a fair handling in the hands of Hussein.

According to the notion of ambivalence, Bhabha (1994) states that, “the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (p.153). In other words, the colonized Other comes to assimilate in himself aspects of his own cultural identity and that of the colonizer. It is also worth mentioning that both colonizer and the colonized can be the victims of such circumstances. In this regard, any individual facing with another culture is under the impact of ambivalence.

Bhabha’s (1994) concept of unhomeliness establishes that, “the negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes a boundary, a bridge, where the ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” (p. 9). This concept of presencing describes the phenomenon whereby people try to make both themselves and their surroundings a part of themselves but they fail to fit in completely.

Applying Bhabha’s (1994) notions of ambivalence and unhomeliness, this study examines how the writer writes back to the empire using the techniques of ambivalence and unhomeliness in the novel Another Gulmohar Tree.

4. Analysis

4.1 Ambivalence in the novel Another Gulmohar Tree

Ambivalence states the “existence of mutually conflicting feelings or attitudes” (Quayum and Talif 1997, p. 5). In literary writings it refers to the mental state of the characters that are up against
challenging circumstances and are required to make a critical choice. In this regard Another Gulmohar Tree presents an ideal scenario for the study of ambivalence in which the main characters Usman and Lydia are stuck between two varied and dissimilar cultures and are required to make critical choices in the way they would like to spend their future lives.

At several places in the novel Usman and Lydia are seen questioning themselves. When Lydia develops a liking for Usman she undergoes contradictory feeling about the whole situation and asks herself how her family would react to it. “Could she ever present Usman to her family as her life’s companion, this man from such a distant place, so different from anything they knew or recognized?” (p. 52). Her dreams about living her life with Usman are mutually conflicting because Usman belongs to a completely different culture and she is not sure whether her family would accept him or not. At another place, Aamer Hussein describes Lydia’s same state of ambivalence when she sails on a boat towards Karachi, ‘she would often wonder: how welcome would a pale foreigner be in a country which had only recently rid itself of the unwanted presence of her kind? And would she herself now seem too much of a stranger to Usman?’ (p. 58).

The continuous variation in being fond of something and thinking about its negative implications at the same time is the ambivalence that Lydia undergoes inevitably. Although Lydia fears that she would not be accepted in Karachi and would have the status of a stranger in Usman’s country yet at the same time she travels to Karachi. She also doubts that she will not be received well by Usman in his own country. Here, the writer uses the technique of ambivalence and writes back to the empire through his character Lydia. The fear in Lydia suggests that she being an English woman will not get the same status and respect in Karachi that she gets in her own country. It may be because of the Britishers being colonizers of the Subcontinent and their bad memories with them in the past. This realization may also be on both ends: colonized and colonizers. On the other hand, Usman who comes from Pakistan and “an ardent reader of Yeats” (p. 36) impresses Lydia “with the quiet dignity of his public manner” (p. 36). Therefore, by crafting a complete reversal of roles between the colonizer and the colonized the writer writes back to the empire.

Later in the novel she thinks of England and questions herself. Should she show her children the places where she went as a child? What would be the conditions in London now? How would she feel there now? (p. 85). Lydia asks herself, “Did she really miss anything in England, besides the late spring weather? After all, she had so much here to replace what she had left behind” (p. 86). These lines depict the tone and character of ambivalence. Lydia recalls England and the places where she went as a child. She wants to learn about present day London. But on questioning herself she finds that the only thing she misses, most probably, is the late spring weather and that she has achieved a comparatively happier life in Karachi with Usman. Once again, the writer uses the technique of ambivalence to write back to the empire. “In London wouldn’t her life in some country village have been far quieter than what she had found here?” (p. 86). Lydia prefers Karachi over London undermining London to the status of a country village. Lydia continues to live in Karachi for the next ten years and her preference for Karachi over London can be seen yet again when at the end of novel Usman thinks of planning a holiday trip to London but to his sheer surprise
Lydia rejects his plan and questions him, “how on earth can we go wandering abroad when there’s so much to be done right here?” (p. 112).

In fact, it is through ambivalence, confusion and probing that Lydia realizes the rightful place where her heart and soul belongs, and that is Karachi the city of her husband and family. She finds happiness in her own way and does not get overwhelmed.

### 4.1.1 Ambivalence in Usman’s character

A similar element of ambivalence is found in Usman’s character. When he decides to return to his country, he asks himself many questions to which he does not find any answers. Hussein describes Usman’s mutually conflicting feelings about Karachi and London. “What awaited him in the seaside city he had chosen as his home? … what would he do with his life in that open city teeming with strangers like himself?” (p. 50). He has similar confusing feelings about London. “What, on the other hand, could he expect from this other city, this imperial dowager … (p. 50) which ‘neither demanded anything of him nor gifted him very much apart from an unexpected friendship’” (pp. 51-52). Usman’s confusion is so intense that it can be illustrated as a battle inside him. The city of London has given him nothing except the friendship of Lydia. He enjoys Lydia’s company and wishes to stay with her as well as has a strong resentment for the imperial London. Usman finds London damp and chilly and its structural design depressive and gloomy (p. 52). On the other hand, he questions himself about Karachi. What he is going to do in the city which he has selected as his home? He is equally a stranger in that city since no one waits for him there. But at least “those strangers would speak to him” in his native tongue and think alike (p. 50). The thing that comforts him in Karachi is the feeling of association that he can have with his own people. He loses his birthplace, Multan, in his childhood, therefore, the only place he belongs to is Karachi. The ambivalence in his thoughts can be found between the desire to go back to Karachi and staying with Lydia in London. Although he is ambivalent between Karachi and London he chooses Karachi over London. Once again, we can see that Hussein writes back to the empire through his character Usman.

### 4.2 The element of Unhomeliness in Another Gulmohar Tree

Bhabha describes the unhomely feeling as, “the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” (1992, p. 141). Home is associated with the feeling of comfortableness, intimacy and attachment. It provides us security and a sense of belongingness. On the other hand, the notion of unhomely designates what is uncomfortable, unknown displaced, and alien (Freud, 2001). The very first example of unhomeliness in Usman can be seen when he was experimenting with stories in London. The writer mentions, “Distance had only sharpened his vision of the land he’d left behind” (p. 44). It actually shows that when one is away from one’s motherland he recalls and remembers his native land all the more. At another instance, he expresses his loneliness in London to Lydia, “I was alone, a stranger in a strange country, I felt like a ghost in the rain … as if I didn’t have a presence or even a body” (p. 51). It expresses Usman’s sense of
dislocation which makes him feel very uncomfortable and unhomely. The writer describes Lydia’s feelings about Usman, “But he hadn’t once pretended he wanted to stay on in England” (p. 52). Lydia had no doubt that Usman considered his future in Karachi where he had a sense of belonging with his own people that spoke his language. He does, eventually, decide to live the remaining part of his life in Karachi; a decision that is led by his sense of unhomeliness. The writer writes back to the empire when the main character Usman chooses Karachi over London.

4.3 Linguistic Choices in the Literary Style of Writing Back to Empire

It is interesting to explore how the writer portrays the confused state of mind and conflicting feelings of the characters through his writing. The writer uses interrogative sentences at several places to exhibit the ambivalence of Usman and Lydia when they undergo contradictory feelings. When Lydia develops fondness for Usman, she questions herself, “Could she ever present Usman to her family …?” (p. 52). This represents her confused state of mind as Usman belongs to a completely different culture which is quite unlike from what her family knows and understands. So, her thoughts about living with Usman are mutually conflicting and the writer has used an interrogative sentence to represent her state of mind. At another place, Lydia asks herself, “would she herself now seem too much of a stranger to Usman?” (p. 58). The interrogative structure of sentence again reflects Lydia’s ambivalence as she sails on a boat to Karachi. Lydia moves to Karachi from London to live with Usman but she is still not sure whether she would be accepted by Usman and her family members in Karachi or not. While travelling to Karachi on boat she further questions herself, “how welcome would a pale foreigner be in a country which had only recently rid itself of the unwanted presence of her kind?” (p. 58). This thought creates an added perplexity for her. Usman’s country (Pakistan) had recently got independence from the British rule, and the natives of Pakistan did not have very friendly feelings for the colonizers. So, the current scenario makes her even more uncertain and she wonders whether the people of Karachi would welcome a British from the colonizer’s land or not.

A number of other occurrences of interrogative sentences can be seen in the novel which reflect the ambivalence of Lydia and Usman. These are discussed in the table below:

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<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Type of Sentence</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>“What awaited him in the seaside city he had chosen as his home?” (p. 50)</td>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>This interrogative sentence represents a similar element of ambivalence in Usman’s character. When he decides to return to his country, he has contradictory feelings about Karachi</td>
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and he wonders how he would spend his life in this city that is full of strangers. As a result of ambivalence and hybrid characteristics of his personality, his own people feel like strangers to him.

2. **“What, on the other hand, could he expect from this other city, this imperial dowager”** (p. 50).

   Interrogative

   Hussein describes Usman’s similar confusing feelings about London. Usman finds London damp and chilly and its structural design depressive and gloomy. Usman’s confusion is so intense that it can be illustrated as a battle inside him. The city of London has given him nothing except the friendship of Lydia. He enjoys Lydia’s company and wishes to stay with her as well as has a strong resentment for the imperial London. Hussein describes Usman’s mutually conflicting feelings about Karachi and London by using the interrogative sentences.

3. **“Did she really miss anything in England, besides the late spring weather?”** (p. 86).

   Interrogative

   This sentence depicts the feeling of ambivalence. Lydia recalls England and the places where she went as a child. She wants to know about present day London. However, on questioning herself she finds that there is only one thing that she truly misses and that is the late spring weather of England. She feels that she has achieved a comparatively happier life in Karachi with Usman. Once again, the writer uses the technique of ambivalence by means of an interrogative sentence.
4. “In London wouldn’t her life in some country village have been far quieter than what she had found here?” (p. 86).

Negative Interrogative

Although Lydia prefers Karachi over London yet she puts a question to herself and imagines that if she had spent her life in a country village in England would not it have been much more peaceful? So, the element of ambivalence in Lydia’s thoughts is quite clear from this interrogative sentence used by the writer.

5. “How on earth can we go wandering abroad when there’s so much to be done right here?” (p. 112).

Interrogative

This sentence is spoken by Lydia when Usman thinks of arranging a holiday trip to London but to his utter surprise Lydia rejects his proposal of going to London and questions him, “how on earth can we go wandering abroad when there’s so much to be done right here?” (p. 112). Lydia continues to live in Karachi and her preference for Karachi over London can be very well seen by this interrogative sentence.

The continuous variation in being fond of something and thinking about its negative implications at the same time is the ambivalence that Lydia and Usman undergo throughout the novel.

5. Conclusion

The research intended to investigate the techniques of ambivalence and unhomeliness used by the writer to write back to the empire and to find out the linguistic implications behind this phenomenon. The researchers intended to find the answers of the following questions:

1. How does the writer use the techniques of ambivalence and unhomeliness to write back to the empire?
2. What are the linguistic choices for the literary style of writing back to the empire?

After a comprehensive textual analysis of the novel Another Gulmohar Tree within the framework of Bhabha’s theory of ambivalence and unhomeliness in particular, it is possible to conclude that Usman is found to embody both the elements of ambivalence and unhomeliness while he is in London. What is interesting to note however, that is the manifestation of this is different in nature.
Lydia, for instance, experiences ambivalence both in London and Karachi but she does not experience unhomeliness. What is common, however, is that ambivalence and unhomeliness compel Usman to make his final decision of spending the remaining part of his life in Karachi. In Lydia’s case it is ambivalence that makes her realize the rightful place where her heart and soul belong to, and that is Karachi the city of her husband and family.

As for as the second research question is concerned, it aimed to highlight the linguistic choices for the literary style of writing back to the empire. From the analysis, it can be clearly seen that the ambivalence of both Lydia and Usman is depicted by the use of interrogative sentences. The two main characters in the novel frequently question themselves when they are in a state of conflict. Lydia’s thoughts about living with Usman are mutually conflicting and the uncertainty in the mind of the character is shown throughout the novel by an introspective tone. Similarly, Usman’s reciprocally contradicting feelings about Karachi and London are portrayed by using the technique of self-questioning and contemplation. Finally, this study has been an attempt to demonstrate how literature furnishes space for the voice of immigrants to spread general awareness.

6. References


