



RESEARCH PAPER

A New Historicist Analysis of Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the novel *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali through the lens of New Historicism which highlights the connection between the literature and the historical period of the work creation. Holding the background of early twentieth-century Delhi, the novel portrays the social and political turn of the Mughal empire and the British rule. The method used for this research paper is qualitative method with descriptive approach. This paper seeks to determine how the text portrays a decaying Delhi through comparing the narrative representation of the social relations and contexts with the documented histories and cultural text from the period of British colonialism and the resulting social crises for a society as depicted by Ali. The analysis of the novel and new historicist approach leads to the key argument, suggesting that Ali points at a postcolonial disintegration of the city and its decaying culture as a metaphor for the breakdown of the civilization under colonial rule. Consequently, this paper affirms that *Twilight in Delhi* is not only a literary piece, but also a historical account that opens a window into the cultural and political climate of the period. Hopefully the findings of this research will help the future researchers to study the novel from the historical, social and political context.

Keywords: *Twilight in Delhi*, New Historicism, British Imperialism, Delhi, Mughal Empire

Introduction

Twilight in Delhi written by Ahmed Ali and published in 1940 is one of the finest novels that encapsulates the flavor of Delhi of early twentieth century when it was under the British ruling. Ali narrates the rich details of the deterioration of culture and complete socio-political transformation under the British rule that characterized a city which was once the epicenter of the Mughal Empire. Ali discusses important issues such as the loss of identity, the struggle of Indian people against colonialism and its aftermath. It can be said that *Twilight in Delhi* is not only an aesthetically valuable piece of literature but also a sociopolitical chronicle of the colonial India.

The theory of New Historicism which evolved in the 1980s along with political concerns of the same period surely gives a brilliant account of interpretation at *Twilight in Delhi*. According to the Greenblatt "even something that seems timeless and universal has a history" (Greenblatt, 1980). Therefore, in featuring New Historicism in the interpretation of *Twilight in Delhi*, this paper aims at studying how the novel merges with the historical realities of the early twentieth century Delhi and in what way it repaints the colonial history by portraying the cultural and social transformation.

The value of *Twilight in Delhi* hence lies in its portrayal of societies internal struggle in embracing the nascent challenge of modernity while confronting colonialism. The development of Delhi portrayed in the novel as shifting from the representative of Mughal royalty to an example of Indian city which became under the British colonial rule mirrors the other Indian cities' transformation during the same period. Even while being a work of migration and writing away from home, Ahmed Ali's narrative is most identifiable for its

nostalgic disposition and is racist in its socio-political outlook. This makes it possible to argue that having two possibilities to observe colonialism, Ali was able to give a broader view on the colonial discourse pointing more specifically on the dissolution of cultural identity and the conflict between tradition and culture in the post-colonial societies.

In approaching the analysis of *Twilight in Delhi* this paper employs the New Historical Criticism to determine how the novel embodies and engages with the historical moment. In particular, it will exemplify how Ali will incorporate facets of history, culture, and literary tools to address the aspects of loss, beginning with the subject of concentrated resistance, and the fabrication of identity processes. Therefore, the analysis will be confined to the manner in which the novel both records and comment on the colonies effects on India as a society and the historical debates, which the novel offers for the formation of cultures of Delhi.

Thus, it is possible to sum up that *Twilight in Delhi* is a valuable work, which provides the reader with the impressing historical and cultural networks of India of the colonial epoch. Therefore, while using the Method of New Historicism in the analysis of the novel, this paper aims at examining how Ali's textual narrative captures and refracts the historical changes of Delhi and offers an elaborate understanding of the social, cultural, political and historical context of the given period. This discussion will endeavor to show how 'Twilight in Delhi' is not only a work that represents its historical political and social setting but also an indication of colonialism and other culture shifts.

Literature Review

Greenblatt (1980), who is the founding figure of New Historicism, has great contributions to work on Renaissance literature and integration of historical context with literary texts. Greenblatt emphasizes that literary works are not just a reflection of their times but are also actively involved in shaping cultural discourse. In his work "Renaissance Self-Fashioning" (1980), it is clearly mentioned that literature and history are mutually influential, as they shape and are shaped by the power dynamics of time.

Gallagher (1994) extends Greenblatt's approach by exploring how literature, particularly novels, interacts with economic and social structures. In her work, Gallagher mentioned that fiction, especially in the 18th century, reflects and shapes the ideological shifts of its period. She emphasizes the role of literary form in engaging with historical changes, arguing that the novel, in particular, was a site of ideological contestation in its time.

Montrose (1989) introduced the concept of "the historicity of texts" and "the textuality of history," and claims that history is dynamic, interpretive process. Montrose's focus is on how texts both reflect and participate in the cultural conditions of their production. He examines the interplay between power, culture, and ideology within historical contexts, arguing that literature as part of broader socio-political movements.

Dollimore (1984) and Alan Sinfield highlights the political interpretation of literature within a historical context. His work on "Radical Tragedy" (1984) reinterprets Renaissance tragedies as expressions of the crises of authority and subjectivity. Dollimore's New Historicist approach focuses on how texts reveal contradictions within dominant ideologies, especially regarding gender, power, and politics.

Sinfield's (1992), contributed to more explicit political critique, focusing on how literature can both reinforce and challenge dominant ideologies. In "Faultlines" (1992), Sinfield argues that literature provides insights into cultural conflicts, particularly around issues of class, gender, and sexuality.

McGann(1983), brings New Historicism movements to Romantic literature, focusing on how historical and political contexts shape the production and reception of literary works. In "The Romantic Ideology" (1983), he critiques the ahistorical readings of Romanticism, claiming that these texts were deeply acknowledged in the material conditions and political struggles of their time.

Wong (2020) conducted a recent research, Wong applies New Historicist principles to analyze how Shakespearean texts can be read in light of 21st-century sociopolitical contexts. Wong argues that contemporary events reshape our understanding of Shakespeare, demonstrating how New Historicism remains relevant for modern interpretations of classical literature.

This new critic platform of New Historicism that came to light in the 1980s mainly focuses on mutual interaction of literature and history. In this respect, this approach affirms that literature is not about literature being a mirror of history but literature being part of history. According to one of the leading New Historicist, Stephen Greenblatt, literature and history are 'co-constructive,' that is, they construct each other.

With the help of New Historicist approach scholars can discuss how 'Twilight in Delhi' is not only a portrayal by Ahmed Ali of early twentieth-century Delhi, but also a response to the cultural and political change of the period. The novelist as described by Naregal (2001) uses the novel to record the decline of Mughal power and the incremental intensification of the British colonization. According to Naregal, what happens in Ali's novel is the tendency to point out the disappearance of cultural or collective identity and the multifaceted nature of the fight against colonial domination, subjugation, and marginalization; the novel is therefore a place of historical compromise.

Hence, the theme of cultural identity under colonial masters is well captured in "Twilight in Delhi." Commenting on this, Gopal (2009) is of the view that this novel exposes the effects of colonialism on the people of Delhi as having trapped between the old and the new ways of life. The author Gopal sustains that Ali's representation of the decaying Mughal heritage applies to the cultural degradation of colonial domination. This is in consonant with the Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity theory in that colonial contacts give rise to mingled places that witnessed perpetual reconstruction of cultural identities.

Further, Waterman (2009) speaks about how Ali deploys various subversive techniques in the colonizers' depiction. In light of Waterman, we can assume that use of Urdu poetry in the novel is an example of micro-powers as a form of culture, and fully agree with the insistence on the role of language and literature in the fight against colonialist domination. Thus, it is possible to view "*Twilight in Delhi*" as a piece lamenting the loss of the tradition as well as a piece with a pronounced critique of the politics of the time.

In totality it can be said that the available literature on *Twilight in Delhi* provides a good manifestation of historical and cultural analysis of the novel with New Historicist paradigm. Based on the manner in which the message of Ahmed Ali's narrative interconnects with the socio-political conditions of the given historical period, scholars have discussed the functions of the novel in active construction of colonial India's historical memory. This literature review shows how a more profound interpretation of '*Twilight in Delhi*' is required one which must acknowledge and address history, culture and identity as formulated in New Historicism approach. There are areas which could be further investigated in future research, especially these themes being the continuation of colonial and cultural themes current discourses on identity and history.

Material and Methods

The method used for this research is qualitative method with descriptive approach. According to Redman and Moray (1923), research is a systematic attempt to gain new comprehension. Methodology is the theoretical examination of the methods that are necessary in all fields of study. It aims to examine the methods. Research problem is explained systematically through methodology by adapting various steps.

Nature of Research

The nature of research is qualitative in nature with descriptive approach. Qualitative-research is also known as "Motivation Research ". Qualitative research is the study of nature of phenomena which includes quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear and the perspective from which they are perceived. (Philipsen and Vernooij - Dassen 2007). Qualitative research typically includes data in the form of words instead of numbers (Punch 2013). Qualitative-research analyzes non numerical data such as text, video or audio and is used to understand how individuals perceive their surroundings (Bhandari 2022). Qualitative research involves observing the population and conducting in - depth interviews or focus group discussions (Corner et al. 2019). It helps to understand the concrete reality of situations. Soratoo et al. (2019) has mentioned that the very fabric of qualitative research is the utilization of open - ended questions whose answers are not easily measured so better explained though qualitative research. Additionally, Moser and Korstjens (2018) has mentioned that is explains all how and why questions rather than how much or how many questions.

Advantages of using qualitative method in Research.

They are more flexible and answers how and why questions. The relationship between participants and researcher is less general. Participants can answer in greater detail. It provides deeper insight into real world issues and problems. (Corner et al. 2019). It mostly focuses on words meanings and their analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Close reading of the Novel *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmad Ali, understanding the meanings of words in *Twilight in Delhi*. Reading and understanding of New Historicism theory of Greenblatt (1980). Comprehending the historical, social, cultural and political context in the novel. Identifying and analyzing the novel through the lens of Greenblatt's (1980) theory of New Historicism.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher used the theory of New Historicism by Greenblatt (1980), because it explains well all the social, cultural, political and historical context better and in a clear way. Furthermore, the novel *Twilight in Delhi* through the lens of New Historicism provides a more sophisticated cultural and historical context in which it evolves.

Results and Discussion

The researchers analyzed the novel *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmad Ali (1940) through the lens of New Historicism by Greenblatt (1980). The novel *Twilight in Delhi* portrays the famous city Delhi and its historical moments under the British colonial dominance. The city was once the epicenter of the Mughal's royalty and is now undergoing a significant transformation under the British rule.

The cityscape of Delhi in the novel from Mughal to British as colonial outpost depicts the sociopolitical transformation, the evidence for this has been highlighted by the author, the decline of Mughal heritage and its replacement with the British heritage can be seen as a physical as well as cultural transformation. According to the text of the novel,

"there it was that the hindu kings had built the early Delhis, Hastinapur or Dilli, and still in Mahroli stands the iron pillar as a memory of Asoka and other ruins of the days of India's golden age, and dynasties greater than history has ever known. Today it was this very Delhi which was being despoiled by a western race who had no sympathy for India or her sons, thought Mir Nihal, already they had put the iron chains of slavery round their once unbending necks." (Ali, 1940 p.136)

Here the author has highlighted the difference between today's Delhi and the Delhi which was built by the ancestors where people lived freely and in today's Delhi people have been put into the chains of slavery.

The author turns our attention by depicting the scenes that vividly represent the most terrible situations that happened in the war of independence 1857,

"It was this very mosque, Mir Nihal remembered with blood in his eyes, which the English had insisted on demolishing or turning into a church during 1857. As he thought of this a most terrible and awe-inspiring picture flashed before his mind. It was on the fourteenth day of September, 1857, that most fateful day when Delhi fell into the hands of English, that this mosque had seen a different sight." (Ali, 1940 p.137)

The novel *Twilight in Delhi* mostly represents the Muslim culture, here he delves through his character "Mir Nihal" into the most terrible incident that happened back in 1857, which Mir Nihal remembered during procession, he still remembers the day when the attackers made a successful attempt in breaking the city wall and insisted on turning the mosque into the church.

"Sir Thomas Metcalf with his army had taken his stand by the hospital on the Esplanade road, and was contemplating the destruction of Jama Masjid" (Ali, 1940 p.137) then the Muslims gathered when they came to know about it, Mir Nihal was just ten years old but he still remembers and the words of a man still rings in his ears, who got up saying "they would all die one, day but it was better to die like men, fighting for their country and islam, the time of your trail has come, I give you the invitation to death, the enemy is standing there right in front of you. Those who wish to prove their mettle should come with me to the northern gate gate of the mosque" (Ali, 1940, p.137) then the Muslims cried in unison "Allah o Akbar" and they started fighting with their swords, most of them lost their lives. The scene depicts the unwavering courage of the people who just fought with the swords until most of them lost their lives, "Mir Nihal couldn't contain himself and his rage burst out of bounds, there were those men of 1857, and here were the men of 1911, chicken-hearted and happy in their disgrace." (Ali, 1940 p.137)

Here the author highlighted the difference in people which he sees, which has been brought with the colonization, there were the people who gave their lives but were not accepting the slavery and there are the people now who are happy, who don't care and are unaware of what has happened to them.

Intersection of history and literary narrative

Ahmed Ali's novel is not only a piece of aesthetics depicting Delhi city but also reflects history and his writing actively engages with historical moments, he has blended the literary art with the history to shape our understanding clear of the colonial Delhi, his characters though fictional, are enmeshed in real historical moments like Mir Nihal, the

author has used this character as his life mostly intersect with major political events, which also reveals the collective experience of loss and oppression. A quote I found interesting when Mir Nihal laments,

"Delhi is not what it used to be, Delhi, which was once the jewel of the world" (Ali, 1940 p.22)

Here the author brings forth with the character's lamentations that Delhi has been completely changed since the British started ruling, the people have been changed even the cityscape which was once in the era of Mughal's is not anymore. The rulers have become the beggars, they have been kicked out of their royal palaces and some have been martyred. The author has also introduced the granddaughter of Bahadur shah Zafar who begged by singing his poems, the poems which Bahadur Shah Zafar had written in his banishment and these poems were banned. Following the text of the novel, Ali introduces another member of the royal family of Mughals,

Mir Nihal was going back home and in the way he met a beggar, "A beggar from a by-lane, lifting himself up on his hands and dragging his legs along the floor and a bag was hanging round his. As the beggar drew near Mir Nihal he stopped and looked up at him with imploring and pathetic eyes. his features unmistakably proclaimed that he was a descendant of Changez...His name was Mirza Nasirul Mulk, and he was the youngest son of Bahadur shah." (Ali, 1940 p.140)

Seeing the royal blood in such a pathetic situation Mir Nihal's cheeks began to quiver and put a rupee in his bag.

According to Stephen Greenblatt, who asserts about literature, he believes that literature doesn't represent only universal truths that can be applied to all times. Instead, it is shaped by the specific historical and cultural settings in which it was written. He emphasized the need to study the social, political, and cultural factors that influenced a work, as well as how the work itself affected the culture and politics of its time. The above quotes from the text clearly signifies and build relation with the author's indication about the erosion of cultural identity and the experience of loss and oppression as a consequence of British colonization.

Cultural identity and historical context

The characters in the novel under analysis are the reflections of the socio cultural transformation which colonialism brought to India. New Historicism assists in how it enables one to view how Ali presents these characters as products of their history. For example, Mir Nihal embodies the older generation who is stuck to the traditional Mughal's values and cannot let go of the way of life but his children portray the 'colonial' sensibilities which has been brought with the British. This shows one of the key postulates of New Historicists, the role of history in constructing individuals and societies. Ali has explored the colonization by taken the character of Asghar as a symbol of colonization.

the youngest son of Mir Nihal, he represents new culture. His character indicates the decline of the Indian life style as well as civilization. Asghar loves the farangies' kind of life and loves to copy them. English dressing is something that Asghar prefers and English furniture like beds, curtains for the rooms, sofas and even shoes, but Asghar's father Mir Nihal don't like him for doing so, it is by no means appreciated by his father and it goes as far as Mir Nihal spoke angrily to his son when he noticed him wearing English boots

"you are again wearing those dirty English boots! I don't like them. I will have no aping the farangi in my house. Throw them away!" (Ali, 1940 p.28)

The main crux derived is that Ali's novel depicts the fragmentation of a coherent cultural subject position due to colonialism. For this, the author has tried to present this evidence through the factionalized family of Mir Nihal in which the young are turning progressive with colonial modernity while the rest of the family is against it. One of the most striking issues I picked up from the novel is the way Ali incorporates the Urdu poetry that asserts the cultural supremacy of the British. I considered this point very persuasive because it gives great importance to language as the means of keeping the culture alive in the face of colonial subjugation which is an aspect very often studied by New Historicism. Ahmed Ali has used the translated version of the Urdu poem often in the novel. The author started his novel from the Urdu translated version of the poem's lines of Hafiz,

"The night is dark, the waves rise mountains high, and such a storm is raging!

What do the pedestrians know my plight moving upon the shore that's safe and dry?"
(Ali, 1940 p.1)

Another valuable point from the New Historicist point of view is that the author of the translated text includes an Urdu poem in it, which can be interpreted as a purposeful act aiming at disclosing the cultural and linguistic subject position that is opposed to colonialism. In this manner, the author incorporates elements of the colonized culture into the language of the colonizer, a strategy which challenges the colonial power structure characteristic of colonial discourses. This act is not only a formal figure of the literary translation but also a political act, against the colonizer.

New Historicism concerned with the interaction between the texts and the context in which those are produced. Here we can interpret the poem as the author's attempt to subtly challenge imperialist views and display anti-imperialist sentiments. By doing so, the author has given a clear indication of the dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized, by introducing a poem from the Urdu language translated version in the text the author has tried to establish his identity against the colonizer.

Discussion

Based on the findings and the definition of The Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2011) which defines New Historicism as "a form of cultural analysis which examines the ways in which a cultural product (especially a literary text) interacts with and participates in its historical context, especially with reference to the power relations operating within the society of its time." which Matt Hickling mentioned in his paper (Hickling & Brock University, 2018) the main claim of new historicist is that the meaning of literature can neither be universal nor it only be derived from the text alone. Rather, they are the product of the author's era and cultural situation. New Historicist don't believe that people can look at the history objectively. They believe that people's understanding and interpretation of history is influenced by many factors like social, political and cultural.

According to the analysis and above definition, the novel offers a vivid exploration which illustrates the sociopolitical and cultural upheavals of the time, under the British colonial dominance as examined through the lens of New Historicism. The novel witnessed the City's (Delhi) transformation from being the epicenter of Mughal's to the colonial outpost of British, highlighting the decay of Mughal's heritage with the replacement of the newly brought British influences, the transformation of the city is not only limited to the physical landscapes but affecting the social and cultural identities of the City's inhabitants. The narrative also highlights the intersection of history and literary expression as the author blends artistically the real historical events into the fabrication of the story, such as the War of independence 1957, the upturning of Mughal's empire and the massacre for the sake of mosque when British dare to demolish. Through the characters Ahmed Ali captures the experience of loss, erosion of culture and oppression that accompanied British colonization.

The tension between the Mughal's traditional values and the newly brought is also evident in the conflict of generation within Mir Nihal's family, where Asghar has been represented as the one who embraces the newly British customs and lifestyle and as well as practices it. Apart from this the Ali's use of Urdu poetry within the novel demonstrates the struggle to preserve cultural identity, the author uses translated Urdu poetry in text which serves as a form of resistance against the British colonialism and establishes his own identity against the colonizer. In examining the novel, in the light of New Historicism, it becomes evident that the author has not only provided a literary narrative but has constructed a sociopolitical and cultural account of the early 20th century, he has portrayed Delhi city under the British colonial period.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* where he tries to describe the life of Delhi as best as he could, he has taken the family of Delhi as a metaphor for the people of Delhi under colonization, the novel serves and offer the intersection of literature and history, capturing the social, political and cultural transformations of the early 20th century Delhi under the British colonial rule. In this paper the novel has been analyzed through the lens of New Historicism, it becomes clear that Ali's work is not only limited to storytelling but, it is a detailed sociopolitical and cultural account that reflects the impact of colonialism on Delhi and its people. The novel meticulously documents the decline of Mughal heritage, the erosion of cultural identity, and the collective experience of loss and oppression brought about by British dominance.

Ali's portrayal of characters like Mir Nihal and Asghar reveals the generational gap, conflict and cultural fragmentation within a society struggling to reconcile traditional Mughal values against the influence of colonial modernity. The use of historical events, such as the 1857 war, the rise of British, and the cultural evolution in Delhi, highlights the focus between personal narratives and broader historical contexts. The inclusion of Urdu poetry emphasizes the importance of language in preserving cultural identity against colonialism amidst colonial subjugation, clearly indicates the anti-imperialist feelings of the author.

To sum up, Ahmed Ali's masterpiece offers a multifaceted meaning, by blending historical reality with the literary narrative, Ahmed Ali offers a poignant critique of colonialism, depicting how history shapes and is shaped by literature. By applying the new Historicism theory. This research paper not only deepens our understanding of the novel but also emphasizes the relation between text and context and also the relevance of New Historicism in exploring the complex relation between history, culture, and identity in colonial contexts.

Recommendations

Future research on *Twilight in Delhi* can be beneficial by expanding the analysis in the novel itself by tracing more historical events with the the relation of context. Apart from this a comparative study of other colonial and postcolonial novels, examining how socio-political changes are portrayed in different regions under colonial rule and by applying New Historicism across different diverse geographical and historical contexts, researchers can further explore the nuanced relationships between history, literature and the power dynamics. Additionally, investigating how contemporary audiences interpret these texts in the light of modern political changes can provide valuable results into the lasting impact of colonialism on society and literature.

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