

Cultural Clash: A Postcolonial Analysis of Tariq Rahman's Charity

Aziz Ahmad*
Tariq Khan**

ABSTRACT

The present position paper explores to examine cultural clash in Tariq Rahman's short story "Charity" taken from "The Legacy and Other Short Stories" (1989). Cultural confrontation is one of the essential features of postcolonial discourse that surfaces when two or more cultures happen to live together. In a post-colonial environment, the clash emerges when the social elites and upstarts impose their appropriated exotic values on the impoverished indigenous natives. That further aggravates the relationship between the cultures and seeps down to the upcoming generations when it goes without timely negotiation and reconciliation. That intergenerational conflict causes irreparable damage to the cultural roots and historical moorings of the participating cultures. The storyline of the "Charity" resonates the encounters between the East (Pakistani indigenous culture) and West (Western-styled Pakistani elite culture) in the sprawling street of Raja Bazaar, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. While analysing the cultural clash and conflict, the paper employs postcolonial theory as a conceptual framework and a reader-

* (Ph. D. Scholar), Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Malakand. E-mail: azizuom@yahoo.com

** Assiatnt Professor, Department of English, University of Malakand. Corresponding E-mail: tariqkhan1975@gmail.com

response technique as a methodological tool. It is inferred from the analysis of the text that socio-cultural fusion and mutual coexistence are imminent, that ultimately leads to the cultural collision in the post-colonial society. Though the plot of the story had a promising start; however, the fluctuating events led to the secession of the two converging cultures—the dominant and the dominated—in the Pakistani post-colonial setting and scenario.

Introduction

This study explores to examine cultural clash in Tariq Rahman's short story *Charity* taken from *The Legacy and Other Short Stories*.¹ The storyline consists of three principal characters, Rabab, Bobby and a clerk, who represent two different and diverse cultural segments. Those are the western-styled elite culture of Pakistan juxtaposed with Pakistani indigenous culture. Although, the study under reference portrays various interpretations and renditions, most notable of which are: socio-cultural issues Pakistanis confront; the theme and motif of charity; and the cultural hybridity. However, the present research converges on the issue of cultural clash and conflict in the backdrop of postcolonial discourse. The leading characters of Rabab and Bobby identify themselves as a westernised Pakistani elites because of their family upbringing and academic education in the West. They are excited to see and explore 'Pakistan'; thus they, at first place, visit Raja bazaar (Rawalpindi's famous old street). The locale is a nexus of the Western and Eastern cultures where the two encounter each other.

The existing research carries out the study of cultural clash in the *Charity* through a postcolonial perspective by employing a reader-response approach.

1 Tariq Rehman, *The Legacy and Other Short Stories* (New Delhi, Commonwealth Publishers, 1989).

Research Question

- How and why the Westernised Pakistani elite culture conflicts with the Pakistani indigenous culture in a post-colonial milieu?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The term “postcolonialism” can generally be understood as the multiple political, economic, cultural and philosophical responses to colonialism from its inauguration to the present day, and somewhat broad and sprawling in its scope”.² The postcolonial (critical and literary) texts probe to highlight the nexus of the dominant and the dominated cultures; thus, spotlighting the hegemonic ideology of the empowered class and the socio-cultural rejoinder of the alleged “others”. The class discrepancy and the associated characteristics with it are reminiscent of the lingering colonial legacy even after the departure of the colonial masters. That, subsequently, leads to cultural collision and conflict between the said segments of the postcolonial society. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin employ the term “post-colonial”, stating that all cultures are influenced and shaped by the colonial apparatus and process from the “moment of colonization to the present day”.³ Postcolonialism marks the close of colonial regimes (mostly) during the first half of the twentieth century, resulting in giving away political and economic freedom to the indigenous people. That, too, is the outcome of the freedom movements prompted by the indigenous leaders to emancipate the marginalised locals. Resultantly, Postcolonial writings (as a discourse) emerges to rebut the colonial monopoly, their henchmen in the guise of national leaders and, consequently becomes the “voice” of the impoverished subalterns. The latter (along with their cultural, socioeconomic and geopolitical issues) has been central to the postcolonial writings. Notable contributors to the

2 Jane Hiddlestone, *Understanding Postcolonialism* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 1.

3 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

postcolonial discourse are Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiango, Edward W. Said, Bill Ashcroft et al., Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Aizaz Ahmad, to name a few.

Postcolonialism/postcoloniality focuses on the holistic effects of colonial residue on the indigenous cultures and societies at large. The term, as initially used by historians after World War II, such as 'post-colonial state', whereby 'post-colonial' has a chronological meaning and message, designating the post-independence period. Nonetheless, from the late 1970s, the term has been employed by literary critics to reflect on and discuss the various socio-cultural impacts of colonisation. Although, the postcolonial discourse (as an academic and research discipline) representing the colonised surfaced in the late 1970s with the text such as Said's "Orientalism", and led to the development of what came to be called as "Colonialist Discourse Theory" in the writings of Spivak and Bhabha. The term 'post-colonial' does not explicitly appear in those pioneering texts to discuss the power dynamics and hegemonic pursuits of colonialist discourse to project the policy management in the "centre" and the "peripheries". According to Bressler, postcolonialism "is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself, particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries".⁴ It omits literature that embodies either Britishers' or American standpoints, instead converges on writings from colonised cultures in Africa, South America, Australia, New Zealand, and other societies that were ruled by socio-cultural, political and philosophical doctrines of Europe. Though there is a little agreement apropos the proper substance, relevance and significance of postcolonial discourse, as a critical creed, instead it has achieved a number of renditions over a passage of time. Unlike "deconstruction" and other recent theories and approaches to textual/literary analyses, postcolonialism is an academic discipline of which even its spelling imparts multiple

4 Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 1.

substitutes, morphologically and pragmatically. The critics are not concordant to whether the term should be used hyphenated or not; that is, 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' have distinct connotations. The hyphenated 'post-colonialism' indicates a chronological phase as is implied by phrases like 'after colonialism', 'after independence', 'after the end of empire' whereas, the term 'postcolonialism' refers to the contours of society from the time of the colonisation to date. As a historical period, post-colonialism stands for the decolonising phase after World War II. Apparently, the colonised seem to have achieved geopolitical independence, yet the colonial remnants remain intact with nascent nation-states. To Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, "the semantic basis of the term 'post-colonialism' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power".⁵ Thus the independence is a matter of time alone and does not concur characteristically with the spirit of independence. In contrast, Mukherjee extrapolates:

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location.⁵

Hence, post-colonialism/postcolonialism is evocative and representative of the tyrannical traits of the colonialists and the suppressed voices of the colonised in all walks of human observations, interests and experiences. Either the latter or both are necessarily focal to the postcolonial discourse.

The existing research pursues a qualitative approach to investigate and examine Tariq Rahman's short story, the "Charity". Methodologically, a Reader's Response Technique is employed to analyse the clash of two cultures, that is,

5 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-4.

represented by the elite social class who identifies themselves with Western lifestyle and, on the other hand, is the local community of Pakistani people epitomised in the character of a clerk. The paper studies the root cause(s) of the two participating, yet opposing cultures.

Cultural Clash: A Postcolonial Feature

Cultural clash arises as a result of the interaction between the contending cultures at a liminal space. The polemical scenario is caused by the differences in social norms and cultural mores in a specific spatio-temporal context. That happens because of not correctly discerning each other's belief system, lifestyle, values and world views, that at times leads to the worst confounded situation. In order to coexist peacefully, they have to figure out commonalities between them and to demonstrate tolerance and forbearance towards each other. Or else, cultural collision is imminent and unavoidable that further widens the gap between cultures. In the current vein, Rogers and Steinfatt elucidate the import and implication of cultural clash as "the conflict that occurs between two or more cultures when they disagree about a certain value".⁶ In a community of settled immigrants, there is a likelihood of cultural encounter, because the immigrant already settled rarely allows the new entrants. Such cultural skirmish leads to an intergenerational confrontation that in effect, engages all the members of the divergent cultures.

That cultural scuffle aggravates between parents and their offsprings when the latter does not meet the goals the former have set for them.⁷ In such a case, the offsprings are taken as defiantly disobedient because they express themselves explicitly regardless of cultural mores and social norms. Rogers and Steinfatt comment that cultural confrontation escalates when continued for an extended period without mediation or reconciliation, and causes severe damage to

6 Everett M Rogers and Thomas M Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication* (Enskede : TPB, 2004), 96.

7 Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

the cultural coexistence.⁸ It is desirable, in a multicultural context, to negotiate issues of mutual concern and come up with a viable solution that serves the interests of all the participating cultures.

Discussion and Analysis

The storyline sets out with an introduction of the two principal characters, Bobby and Rabab. Being a narrator of the story, Bobby presents himself and Rabab as “Westernized elite of Pakistan”.⁹ Rabab’s father had been a diplomatic emissary in Europe wherein he had academic access to the Rugby, Harrow and Switzerland.

Rabab is anxious to see ‘Pakistan’ as she believes that the real Pakistan is different from the sophisticated urban life they live in. Nonetheless, the motive behind seeing ‘Pakistan’ is not to carefully observe its people and their social issues but for recreation alone. As far her physical appearance is concerned, Rabab has a “shapely body” and is dressed in “hip-hugging jeans”, that is typical of the western lifestyle; not knowing the sparse conditions of people around who put on frayed clothes and live in an austere environment.¹⁰ At the same time, she is insensitive, too, about the underprivileged Pakistanis whom she would encounter.

That is where the initial cultural collision takes place between the two divergent cultures. Bobby describes them as ‘alien’ because of having never interacted with ordinary Pakistanis. Even boarding a public bus that is bound for Raja bazaar, Rawalpindi, is difficult for them as they had not experienced travelling in such overcrowded transport. Mostly, it is “students, workmen and women in the veil and old men” who get to travel on such public transportation—that makes these laymen “tired, angry and frustrated”.¹¹ For Bobby and Rabab,

8 Rogers and Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication*.

9 Tariq Rehman, *Charity* (New Delhi, Commonwealth Publishers, 1989), 20

10 Rehman, *Charity*, 20

11 Rehman, *Charity*, 21

the very first encounter with locals is disparaging and repels their curiosity to travel in such bizarre public transport where people were pushing each other hard to accommodate themselves in a packed bus. Experiencing that widens the gap between the social elites and the populace, and creates tediousness in mutual relationship. Another dissatisfying scene is observed when they see segregated portions for ladies and gents inside the bus that reminds them of the gender-biased Pakistani society.

They, too, were troubled by the “unpleasant odour of human perspiration and stale vegetables”, though such experiences were shared in public places.¹² Panels of the buses were damaged, and at every bus stop, the “struggling brown bodies” were conspicuously seen assaulting the passengers already sitting inside.¹³ The schoolboys and schoolgirls were gazing at the two with a wish to put on dresses they had worn; even the girls were more keen to be “dressed like Rabab”.¹⁴ The “struggling humanity” were looked down upon by their fellow-beings and were abused verbally for their misconduct at the public spaces.¹⁵ A ‘burqa’ clad woman could not forego the commotion, desperately seeing the spectacle, at which her husband battered her. Rabab noticeably observes her large visible eyes, and she could not get to know the reason of her face hiding. Thereby, the public bus became a cultural hub symbolising the behavioural pattern and lifestyle of the commoners and the elite gentry as enthusiastic onlookers.

In Rawalpindi, they happened to see trailing *tongas* and Japan made motorcars, to which Bobby retorted that the cars “rushed arrogantly past the jogging tongas”.¹⁶ Bobby reacted that “the twentieth century collided with the

12 Rehman, Charity, 21

13 Rehman, Charity, 21

14 Rehman, Charity, 21

15 Rehman, Charity, 22

16 Rehman, Charity, 22

medieval”.¹⁷ The remarks are pungently biting, and the comparison is deridingly jeering; however, that is the impression they get from the overall spectacle. The discussion furthers between the two about the deplorable state of the peasants and their living conditions. The analysis portrays the class differences that, in effect, leads to a clash between the contending cultures. Seeing beggars on the bustling streets, the two started discussing the reasons causing beggary. Rabab reveals herself to be uncharitable and is of the view that “one must give for love. Charity is given to those we pity, we despise or hate”.¹⁸ That, too, reflects her aversion for the downtrodden and oppressed class, which presumably aggravates the cultural clash between the classes under reference. Derogation of the poor and the reasons behind dismal poverty are the subjects being discussed by the high-ups, not necessarily for solving the issue but to claim their inherent right of being privileged. Thus, the sanity is that the poor get more miserable in comparison to the rich who get more affluent in a class-oriented society, like Pakistan. The dominated has to work hard as a ‘horse in a mil’ and is beset by the stringent dominant class. Hence it is financial misappropriation in a class-led environment, that in turn creates a gap between cultures.

Bobby, as educated in the West, finds places in Pakistan different while describing the restaurant as ‘dirty’, ‘dingy’, and home to ‘vulgar poverty’.¹⁹ The people sitting there were dubbed as “coarse brown faces’ who were staring at them with ‘unbelievable eyes’ and got humiliated at their arrival in there.²⁰ That scene ostensibly portrays a cultural cleavage between them and the ‘NATIVES’. Amid the commotion of the people, Bobby expresses that “the word burnt my mind, scorched my lips, [and] expressed itself in the contempt in

17 Rehman, Charity, 22

18 Rehman, Charity, 23

19 Rehman, Charity, 24

20 Rehman, Charity, 24

my eyes”.²¹ Inside his mind, he feels an exclamation that “these are my own people!”.²² They were gazing ‘unabashedly’ which made the two ‘restless’.²³

In the meantime, Rabab happens to see the clerk, who is described as “reedy” man wearing ‘shabby clothes’ and having an ‘absurd look on his face’.²⁴ He represents the indigenous community, who is staring at Rabab as “his eyes were full of naked longing as he devoured every inch of Rabab’s voluptuous body. When his eyes met mine, he pretended to look down. But oh, how brazen he was. As soon as I looked away he started leering at Rabab, his mouth drooling I bet”.²⁵ Since extended segregation between men and women turns the colonised society to be morally abnormal; thus, it is considered to be usual to look intently at women. That is said to be wanton by the elite group, and the colonised are arguably inclined to sensuousness. In turn, the association of baseness with and tagging the underprivileged class to lasciviousness malign them characteristically, whereas on the other hand labelling the elites as ethically blameless.

Realising the clerk’s desire, Rabab approached to him and agreed to spend some time with him at the cost of ‘hundred chips’; not knowing his sensuous intentions. On their way to his apartment, Bobby describes the roads as ‘crowded’.

we entered a slum where the sun could never have peeped even once in a day. The air seemed to be petrified and stagnant. Then we walked in narrow Street with lanes on both sides and gutters running along. A mass of impoverished humanity seemed jailed within those towering walls. Up above, the sky seemed dark and remote and indifferent. Even God seemed to be far from these wretched members of the globe. And the gutters stank and the wives shouted with shrill in and bitter voices at numerous children.

21 Rehman, Charity, 24

22 Rehman, Charity, 24

23 Rehman, Charity, 24

24 Rehman, Charity, 24

25 Rehman, Charity, 24

And the children fought and cried and mongrels barked at each other. It was the very house of squalor. It was the heart of wretchedness.²⁶

The above quote explicitly describes the overpopulated slums, their nasty inhabitants, along with the filth scattered around. The ranting mothers, their quarrelling children, the overspilling gutters and the foul smell that filled the smoggy air of the slum typified the appalling condition of the inhabitants. Noticeably, the slum had never seen a ray of sunlight even once in years. Bobby and Rabab were cynical of the locale and had disgusting feelings about the residents, which she expresses as nasty and 'filthy'. To great dismay, the room of the clerk is called as a 'dark little hole', where he dreamt of pretty girls while sleeping on the tainted pillow and yellow-stained bedsheets.²⁷ The room smelled of stale vegetables. The abominable state of the slum is indicative of the living conditions of the repressed class of society. Bobby and Rabab as representative of the elite group abhorred the entire community living therein.

Rabab takes out the sum of one hundred rupees, lights up the expensive cigarette with burning hard cash given by the clerk. Furthermore, she hurls the two crispy notes of a hundred rupees on clerk's face, saying that she is the daughter of a minister and could instantly buy him and his entire family. Such an abject humiliation causes a deeprooted revulsion for Rabab and elitism (her class belongs to) by and large. The class difference manifest in such happening paves the way for a despicable collision between the high and low, the dominant and dominated.

Of her hip-hugging jeans in the clerk's community is deemed to be immoral; thus, she was taken as 'prostitute' and promiscuous—the usual perception of the commoners about the elites.²⁸ The clerk, too, objects to the unseemly yet

26 Rehman, *Charity*, 24

27 Rehman, *Charity*, 24

28 Rehman, *Charity*, 25

enticing dress of the Rabab. Later that night, after getting back to their bungalow, Bobby saw her coming back in her car from the clerk's apartment. On inquiry, she told him of her visiting the clerk's apartment and spending some time with him. However, her 'dishevelled' hair and the crestfallen shirt was the telling tale of her visiting the clerk that night.²⁹ That reveals the intention of her nocturnal visitation as to quench the clerk's covetousness for her.

Conclusion

Eventually, it is concluded from the foregoing discourse that how two divergent cultures collide and creates an environment of animosity. The Pakistani social elites (Robby and Rabab) characterising the Western values system juxtaposed to Pakistani indigenous community (represented by the clerk) are at daggers drawn to each other. First, commingling (promisingly) and then seceding (despicably) from each other are typical to the relationships of the coloniser and the colonised. Since the encounter is bitter and the rapport is stark, therefore, the relationship is never longlasting between the opposing cultural norms and social mores. Now and then, during the development of the storyline, the characters liaise for peaceful co-existence, but all in vain because of the potential differences between the said cultures. In a nutshell, the cultural collision is impending, and the conflict is imminent; that is why it seems a far cry to bridge up the disparity established over a passage of time.

29 Rehman, Charity, 25