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Delhi: A Metaphor of Hope and Despair in Delhi and Twilight in Delhi

Abstract

*This paper is an effort to de-construct the two opposite ideas of hope and despair in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* and Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*. The comparative points of view regarding Delhi by Singh and Ali serve to construct the ideological, political and ontological framing of Delhi. The paper explores the significance of Delhi as a symbol of political energy which distributes power or snatches it as an active agent of power-history. The paper exhibits the socio-political, economic and communal structures portrayed by Ali and Singh. The study is an effort to detect the system of representation in the metaphor of Delhi in the context of power-resistance and failure of the struggle against the Raj. The paper tries to show that both Ali and Singh see Delhi with a difference of outlook and literary approach to manifest hope and despair.*

Key Words: Delhi, Political-energy, Power-resistance, Representation, Subcontinent.

Introduction

The present study tries to deconstruct the literary identity of Delhi as a metaphor of despair and hope in the narratives by Ahmed Ali and Khushwant Singh. Northrop [Frye \(1971\)](#) points out that a work of literature has its implied or expressed relation between its creator and its auditors. The emergence of this intricate relationship between the writer and the reader becomes an original source of literary persuasion on the one hand and a link between the creative cause and its implied effects on the other.

[Bressler \(2011\)](#) points out that Derrida considers writings and language as a means of signification. *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali and *Delhi* by Khushwant Singh represent multiple themes to describe the political, economic, and social effects of the Raj.

Delhi is written in the background of pre, and post-colonial shifts, *Twilight in Delhi* is a representation of the colonial era. Khushwant Singh in *Delhi* tries to materialize the communal idealism with his critical outlook on history and politics. Khushwant Singh writes of what he knows, from his own experiences, to be true; that is what he writes in the introduction to *Delhi* (1999): "In this novel, I have tried to tell the story of Delhi from its earliest beginnings to the present times. I constructed it from records chronicled by eye-witnesses".

Ahmed Ali's novel also represents some historical events through the mode of typical eastern literariness. Instead of directly approaching his theme of political and marginal intricacies of Raj, Ali represents an emotionally aesthetic account of the downfall of the Muslim community. Partly, Ali's narrative can be called a pseudo-sentimental account of the destructive colonial effects on the Muslim community of undivided India. [Arif & Gul \(2015\)](#) identify the sense of loss and passivity in Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. They point out that, "Ali laments over the loss of old traditions, customs and manners". Since *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) was written and published during the colonial regime, the utterance of the prohibited talk of colonial injustice in India as a thematic representation is remarkable. Therefore, Ali's narrative can be, and should be, discharged from the blame of being sentimental, since literary aestheticism becomes the only way available with Ali for the presentation of colonial repression. However, [Arif & Gul \(2015\)](#) reinforce the fact that Ali's intention in writing *Twilight in Delhi* is to represent the victory of evil over good and the helplessness of man before fate.

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Ali's authorial tone is somehow marginalized by the colonial terror in his introduction to *Twilight in Delhi*. The novel by Ali is a representation of emotional disturbance caused by colonial shackles while this psychic stress is exhibited through the artistic form of an allegory in the novel. Thus, it becomes obvious from the above argument that Ali's discourse is an intellectual requirement of his time which easily exonerates him from being sentimental. For the colonial pressure on his literary creativity has been more telling than on his historical sense.

On the other hand, Khushwant Singh is a contemporary writer. His *Delhi* (1999) is an audacious attempt on the part of his literariness which is significant in its presentation of reality. Jonathan Culler in defining Derrida's concept of metaphysics of presence notifies that, according to Derrida, the authority of present structures all our thinking ([Jonathan Culler 1982, p.94](#)). The conscious artistry of Khushwant Singh has been directed toward another and quite a different goal--that of seeing and reporting the actual. To him, it is the writer's business to feel and to put down what really happened in action. That is why his character Singh refutes Bhagmati's fears of the imminent danger of communal violence against Sikhs after the demise of the Golden Temple until he himself observes it: "It can't be all that bad. This is a civilized country, I tell her. She looks up with her tear-stained eyes" ([Singh 1999, pp. 732-733](#)).

Khushwant Singh has been very generous and liberal towards his apparently critical themes of colonialism (i.e. from the Turk to the British), communal prejudice, immorality, treachery and other themes. This artistic concern and sincerity have emerged from Khushwant's need for simplicity and straightforwardness. He does not want to entangle himself in a more complex exhibition of emotion and sentimentalism. That is why, the exponent of his novel Singh is a perambulating and flexible character who keeps himself away from any exhibition of extreme emotionalism, either in love affairs or in the identity questions.

Ali's novel is intentionally made by him a representative of gloom and despair so that a reader can possibly figure out the reason behind the pain of the Muslim downfall in Delhi during the Raj. Singh's novel, too, is a deliberate account of impersonal sensuousness and naughtiness which is imposed by him on his narrative in order to have the implicit seriousness of his themes. However, both novels on Delhi have their own patterns of contrast. Khushwant Singh's narrative is specifically dedicated to the art of paradox, while Ali's figurative language constitutes a prominent world of difference in reality and appearance. There are many aspects of Delhi which are explored by Khushwant Singh and Ahmed Ali in their novels through their innovative thematic structure to create the critical identification of hope and despair.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is focused on:

1. To analyze the textual use of Delhi by Ahmed Ali and Khushwant Singh as a metaphor of communal dislocation and as a signifier of hope during the Raj.
2. To search for the effects and the influence of the colonial period in the subcontinent, in constructing the communal structures on the basis of the socio-religious system to subdue the natives.

Literature Review

This paper seeks its analytical intention in the selected texts of *Delhi* and *Twilight in Delhi* to refill the research pattern by the historical, cultural and narrative ontological background to detect the significance of Delhi as a metaphor of hope and despair. [Arif and Gul \(2015\)](#) recount *Delhi* as a novel which circles around the themes of history, romance and sex. According to [Arif & Gul \(2015\)](#), *Twilight in Delhi* is a literary effort by Ali, which is closer in style with that of the Victorian writers. Like Hardy, Ali wants to show that man is helpless against the heavy odds of society ([Arif & Gul, 2015](#)).

[Noreen \(2014\)](#) manifests that, "*Twilight in Delhi* is a heart-throbbing description of the tried Muslim culture of time and a painful lament on the loss of some precious values". [Sardar \(2015\)](#) writes that "*Twilight in Delhi* recaptures the magnitude decaying twilight of pale unique Delhi but of the finish Muslim's control". [Aslam et al. \(2015\)](#) write that the title of the novel, *Twilight in Delhi* is a self-

representation of its theme which shows the effect of a dimmed light of Muslim glory and civilization under the Raj. [Marlewicz \(2106\)](#) points out that *Delhi*, by Khushwant Singh is written to highlight the experiences of men and women living in Delhi city over an extended period of time.

Research Methodology

This paper is a critical debate on the concepts of hope and despair in *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali and *Delhi* by Khushwant Singh. This paper tries to deal with the concepts of hope and despair as a contrast to each other in the selected novels on the historical city of Delhi. The literary theory of deconstruction is followed in this study. Jacques Derrida's concepts of metaphysics of presence and difference are applied in this paper to map out the significance of reality in the very concept of power. This paper tries to find out the politics of deconstruction in the very concept of reality. It is important to note that for Derrida, there is no such thing as objective reality, while all definitions of truth are subjective in his consideration of reality ([Bressler, 2011, p.88](#)). The method of close readings is used for this purpose in this paper to relocate the textual meanings of the selected concepts in the texts. Qualitative method is applied to this paper to acquire a critical purpose.

Discussion and Analysis

In *Delhi* and *Twilight in Delhi*, human nature is portrayed through a realistic association with history. Ali has shown an understanding of human nature through its confrontation with a cultural change. Mir Nihal is a traditionalist and an adherer of typical feudal habits. His mental design and manners are shaped by Delhi Muslim culture. He is a pigeon flyer, a constant visitor of brothel house but offers his prayers five times a day: "He is an aristocrat in his habits, no doubt, a typical feudal gentleman, as his hobbies testified" ([Ali, 1940, p.38](#)).

He is an authoritative person and has considerable control over his household. But things fall apart when British Raj consolidates its rule in Delhi, and there is an ultimate struggle between the declining culture of Delhi and the ruling culture of Raj. Mir Nihal becomes the direct victim of this confused cultural negotiation because it has threatened his own monopoly over his family members on the one hand and on his identity as a Delhi Muslim on the other. He believes in the protection of his culture and his family norms.

When Mir Nihal gets stricken first by his own son Asghar and then by nature which brings him disease and death of his mistress he thinks about the larger design of cultural and communal manipulation by the Raj. Nihal thinks that Raj (Christianity) has successfully colonized his family (Islam), through Asghar, who has adopted modern ways.

For Mir Nihal, this Anglo-Indian hybrid culture is a sense of pain and confusion on his part. He is reminiscent of the old culture of Delhi, its cherished ways and its open opportunities for the flourishing of specific Indian culture before the arrival of the British. He considers Raj to be responsible for the entire disturbance in his domestic and cultural life. Therefore, it is easy to locate that Ali's basic themes in his novel are the downfall of Muslim culture in Delhi under the colonial rule on one way and the representation of individual nature of his characters on the other.

This parallelism on the level of theme and character makes *Twilight in Delhi* an ideal representation of Delhi in the true sense of the term. On the other hand, in *Delhi*, a reader can find a more deliberate and obvious effort to encapsulate different, almost all possible characteristics of Delhi and its culture. Khushwant Singh not only covers the ancient history of Delhi and its manifestation but also discovers a sense of the relationship between its past and present through a typical native cultural spirit. His themes in the novel are very convincing and powerful. He seems to have a more broaden outlook on the individual and cultural nature of Delhi and its inhabitants.

He is more inclined towards a realistic representation of Delhi through an accurate account of facts. However, his fictional calibre lies in the exposition of these facts through systematic knitting of thematic structure and its narrative design. Like Ali, Khushwant Singh is also a conscious artist who is aware of his literary task. That is why he seems more flexible and fluid with his characters because he allows them to speak through the colour of their own individual and traditional nature. This quality adds more flavour in Khushwant's narration of Delhi than of Ali's.

Ali has somehow restricted his character's open nature under the folds of cultural premonition. Moreover, if Khushwant has thrown light on Delhi through the torch of a cultural web entrapping all communities, e.g. Hindu, Muslim, Sikhs, Christians, and Outcastes, Ali has narrowed his description of Delhi through the only nation—Muslims. This limitedness of range definitely causes a marked difference between the viewing of Delhi by both writers. But if Ali is argued for his specificity of Muslim culture in his Delhi representation, it becomes obvious that it becomes a basic necessity of his theme of the downfall of Muslim culture in the hands of the Raj. Ultimately, this theme involves two nations representing east and west, which explains Ali's critical intention to expand the scenario of Delhi talk between two continents as a direct contrast. Therefore, Ali's discourse is more implicit, and its actual motifs are embedded into layers of meaning which is different from Khushwant's self-expository and self-explanatory description of Delhi.

Khushwant has elaborated Delhi and its inhabitants through the eyes of foreign invaders and colonizers on one way and through the observation of its dweller Singh and his mistress Bhagmati, a eunuch on the other. He has attributed Delhi's geographical centrality for the emperors to its people's erratic and over passionate nature: "The people of Delhi are both ungrateful and cowardly" (Singh, 1999, p.537). Timurid is a Turk warrior and an invader in India. He is a man of understanding. He soon comprehends the mental design of Indian society through the Delhi dwellers, "It does not take long for the men of Hindustan to switch their minds from fawning flattery to deadly hate" (Singh, 1999, p.460). On the other hand, there is Singh, the main character from contemporary Indian period which exhibits before a reader the real picture of Delhi as a guide and native of the city by associating his mistress Bhagmati with the typical culture of Delhi: "Delhi and Bhagmati have a lot in common. Having been long misused by rough people, they have learnt to conceal their seductive charms under the mask of repulsive ugliness (Singh, 1999, p.365).

The people of Delhi are careless and become rebellious when any type of restriction or bondage is imposed upon their usual lifestyle. They appear, great opportunists, flatterers, passionate lovers, guileful, treacherous, and flippant in their behaviours in *Delhi*. Singh himself is a true example of typical 'Dhilliwalla' (Delhi dweller).

He is a guide to foreign tourists and enjoys his opportunities to deal with his female clients. He treats a fate-smitten female 'hijda', Bhagmati politely, and timely provide her shelter at his flat. Khushwant's approach in *Delhi* is Machiavellian. He has introduced kings and common people in his narrative and has gone further to mingle the ancient history with the contemporary happenings in Delhi. In the tradition of Shakespearean drama, a reader can find a great variety of kings and princes with typical and distinctive habits.

Khushwant Singh has described in detail the consequences which lie behind the fall of Delhi in the reign of Bahadur Shah. He has fictionalized history by elaborating that character is destiny. Since Shah's predecessors are the conquerors of India, what Shah has done; he has lost Delhi through disqualifying himself as a king and a warrior. Because being a king, he has to show some seriousness in state matters rather than in doing poetry and attending dance parties. On the other hand, during this dance party, the British army has contrived an action on Delhi by the help of Sikhs and other nations which want to take revenge from Muslim emperors in India for the religious unjust against them. The result is obvious: a quick downfall of Muslim culture and kingship in Delhi, the capital of India. Here, Shah's character becomes an ultimate destiny for the downfall of his kingship because he is aware of the imminent danger of war in Delhi, but he does not engage himself in any war strategies instead considers, "Delhi, the state of affairs, to use Saadi's expression, entangled like the hair of Negroes" (Singh, 1999, p.641). The British army is marching ahead to Delhi when its king is receiving homage from his courtiers.

Thus, Khushwant Singh's thematic posture in *Delhi* is based on a critical inquiry through the ironical mode. He has discussed themes of partition, Marxism, feminism, colonialism, nationalism etc. in his novel. However, the essence of his objective is embedded in his plain and straightforward description. If Ali's basic theme is the downfall of Muslim nation under British colonialism, each of Khushwant's themes constitutes a major theme of the novel because the whole novel is integrated from the beginning to the end in an organic unity in spite of its temporal shifts.

Hope and despair in *Delhi* and *Twilight in Delhi*

Thought, in *Twilight in Delhi* and *Delhi* is progressive about hope and despair. In *Delhi* thought of hope develops through a panorama of sub-thoughts which are related to one another chronologically. In *Twilight in Delhi*, the thought of despair establishes through the use of events and their consequential effects in linear connection. Some events in the novel have already happened in the fictional past such as the incident of 'Mutiny', Begam Waheed's marriage and widowhood, Sham's marriage, death of Dilchain's son etc. The incidents which are experienced by a reader himself have the impact of previously untold ones. Khushwant Singh's discourse proceeds through the fluctuate details of incidents. In spite of its fragment design, *Delhi* is an intimate account of a journalist.

Colonialism: The Imperative Idiom of Power

The act of writing texts of any kind in post-colonial areas is subject to the political, imaginative, and social control involved in the relationship between colonizer and colonized (Fanon, 1963). *Delhi* and *Twilight in Delhi* are the representative postcolonial texts written in response to the typical hierarchy of colonialism in the subcontinent. But there lies a difference in the representation of different aspects of colonial apprehension in both novels.

Therein Khushwant Singh's fiction, a reader can find an implicit critique of colonial mechanism which is deeply rooted in the social, political and economic system of the subcontinent. Ali has manifested in his novel the influence of a powerful foreign cultural and political establishment on the previously influential set cultural setup of Delhi.

Beyond the narrative differences in *Delhi* and *Twilight in Delhi*, both novels pay considerable attention to the theme of oppression and power relation between the colonizer and the colonized. Khushwant Singh presents, relatively a comprehensive study of the circumstances which are involved in the establishment of such association. Ali has given a dimmed history of the Raj and concentrated on its effects on Muslim nationhood in Delhi. Khushwant has given a logical and critical picture of colonialism in *Delhi*, while Ali has established the aesthetic and irrational account of the accommodation of Raj in *Twilight in Delhi*. Khushwant's view of colonialism is archaeological and factual. On the other hand, Ali's view of the same is fictional and literary. Khushwant's view of colonialism is complex and indirect, while Ali has directly dealt with the theme of suppression. Khushwant has presented his view of colonialism through communal perspective; Ali has established his single-minded ideology through the denial of communal presence altogether.

Khushwant Singh has projected an analytical study of colonization in his narrative. He has discussed Delhi as a lucrative and alluring territory for the foreign invaders; Europeans or Middle Asians. Therefore, Khushwant has developed a juxtaposed reading of colonialism and imperialism in order to factorize his observation on Delhi. The projection of historical extension makes Khushwant's discourse more illuminating and legendary than that of Ali's psychological portrayal of colonialism. Khushwant has presented Delhi people as natives of land which has been constantly colonized and monopolized by certain foreign nations: "There were Quzilbashs and Turks and Georgians, Uzbegs, Afghans, Pathans, and Biloches" (Singh, 1999, p.527).

Imperialism is the policy of extending a nation authority by territorial acquisition or by the establishment of economic and political hegemony over other nations.

By giving a comprehensive view of the Delhi history, Khushwant Singh has classified the colonial system in India into two outlooks:

1. Asian colonial view
2. Western colonial view

In *Twilight in Delhi*, a reader can confront with a limited justification of the British colonial rule in India. At the same time, there is no obvious description found on the glorious Muslim dynasty in *Delhi* except Begum Jamal and Begum Nihal's praising of the Mughal kings to highlight their disgust against the Raj. On the other hand, there is only the description of the downfall of the Muslim glory in *Twilight in Delhi* during British colonization. Ali has given the western view of colonization and its deranging effects on the Indian Muslims only. Both Ali and Khushwant Singh have presented the native prejudice against the Raj Khushwant Singh has unveiled the double standards of the Raj for the Indian natives

but has advocated the doctrine of secularism. The Sikh builder adopts the western ways but does not allow his children like his father to stray away from the fundamental principles of his religion and culture. This attitude constitutes more a hybrid reconciliation towards religion which is partly fundamental and partly secular in its nature in order to survive successfully in any type of situation. In the story of the Untouchables and Musaddi Lal, Khushwant Singh has propounded the Machiavellian philosophy of might is right, by ridiculing the people being reminiscent of the past glory. This shows Khushwant's practical approach to life and the psychology of colonialism. On the other hand, Ali is following Fanon's theory of decolonization. Fanon introduced in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), this theory of decolonization, arguing that only a thorough, truly socialist revolution carried out by the suppressed colonized (the wretched of the earth), could bring justice to him. Ali deliberately neglected the presence of other communities in Delhi, which have also been affected by the Raj. This shows Ali's aim, which is definitely non-secular.

What Khushwant Singh represents in his novel is a complete acceptance of secularism which is the only way to live in a multinational culture like India. He has also recommended that there should be a complete acceptance and harmony among different religions by anti-violence preaching of 'Gandhiism' and 'Nehruism'. His portrayal of the characters like Bhagmati, Musaddi Lal, Meer Taqi Meer and Singh is the representative of his secular idealism. Singh's view of Delhi is more detailed and analogous than Ali's narrow representation of the Delhi culture, represents the Muslim community only.

Conclusion

In the end, to conclude this paper, it is said that Delhi is used as a metaphor of despair and hope by Ahmed Ali and Khushwant Singh in their respective novels on Delhi city. The spatial significance of Delhi as a historical place is notified by Ali has its traces of Muslim downfall under the cruel colonial project. Singh focuses Delhi as a place of multiple histories which range from the rare past to the present time communal anarchy. Both writers have deployed their characters to portray the intended expressions of hope and despair in their novels on Delhi.

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