A Postcolonial Reading of Elif Shafak's *Honor* and Daniel Benyamin's *Goat Days*

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قراءة "ما بعد استعمارية" لرواية اليف شافاق "شرف"، ورواية بنيامين دانييل "أيام الماعز

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وزارة التربية / مديرية تربية الانبار

Abstract

The paper offers insight into Daniel Benjamin's 2008 novel "*Goat Days*" and Elif Shafak's 2011 novel "*Honor*." The study examines postcolonial theory as an intellectual framework, based on the perspectives of notable theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhaba. The study focuses on key terms in postcolonial theory, such as sublaternity, unhomeliness, and identity, providing a brief description of each. Spivak's concept of subalternity is applied to both works, demonstrating that the characters in both novels are social minorities who have been denied basic rights in their respective societies. Seeking a better life and a brighter future for their families, they immigrated to more developed cultures. They encounter several challenges, the most significant of which is assimilating into the new culture, whose ideals differ from the ones upon which they were raised. Bhaba's concept of unhomeliness is used to demonstrate how these personalities could not fully integrate into the new cultures. As a result, they are experiencing an identity crisis. **Keywords: Postcolonial, Spivak, Bhaba, subalternity, unhomeliness, identity**

ملخص الدراسة

يقدم البحث دراسة لرواية " شرف " للكاتبة التركية اليف شفق ٢٠١١ ورواية بنيامين دانييل " أيام الماعز،٢٠٠٨ تشكل نظرية " ما بعد الاستعمارية" اطارا فكريا للبحث، مع تسليط الضوء على اراء منظرين بارزين هما غياتري سبيفاك وهومي بابا. يتناول البحث مفاهيم "الثانوية" و"عدم التآلف" و"الهوية" وكيف ان مفهوم الثانوية للكاتبة سبيفاك يمكن تطبيقه على الروايتين، حيث ان الشخصيات في الروايتين هما أقليات اجتماعية حرمت من ابسط حقوقها الإنسانية الأساسية. يهاجر افراد هذه الأقليات الى مجتمعات أخرى بحثا عن حياة أفضل ومستقبل مشرق لعوائلهم حيث يشكل مفهوم " عدم التآلف" لهومي بابا تحديا حقيقا امام هؤلاء الافراد الذين لم يستطيعوا الاندماج والتأقلم مع المجتمعات التي هاجروا اليها وهذا بالتالي أثر كثيرا على هويتهم الحقيقية وصعوبة الحفاظ عليها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمارية، سبيفاك، بهابا، الثانوية، عد التآلف، الهوية

Introduction

Goat Days (2008) by Benyamin Daniel was a best-seller in Malayalam when it was published to critical praise. Benyamin's witty and sympathetic narrative transforms this bizarre and cruel comedy of Najeeb's existence in the desert into a universal tale of loneliness and alienation, making him one of Malayalam literature's great new talents. Najeeb's greatest desire is to work in the Gulf and make enough money to send home. He realises his desire only to be catapulted into a slave-like environment herding goats in the middle of the massive Saudi desert by a succession of harsh and ridiculous events. Najeeb is haunted by memories of his village's rich, verdant countryside and his loving family, and his only relief is the company of goats. Finally, the lonely young man devises a perilous plan to escape his desert captivity. The protagonist in Goat Days is so vividly depicted that one can almost smell the goats, terror, and despair. Goat Days' key themes include diaspora, immigration, enslavement, confinement, brutality, suppression, and religion. Identity and alienation are the most prevalent of these topics. Because of the harsh arbab, he is a repressed creature in a distant place.

Honor (2011) by Elif Shafak tells the narrative of three generations of a culturally divided Turkish-Kurdish family who travel to London and face yet another cultural barrier. The narrative begins once Naze, who had always longed to hold a son, delivers birth to twin daughters named Pempe and Jamila. The story deconstructs the specific kind of patriarchy that exists in Turkish society and sharply attacks the acceptance of violence against women. The story recounts the fates of two sisters who were born in a tiny Kurdish village and deals with a tragic narrative of love, family, and misunderstandings. The ambitious girl, Pempe, along with her Turkish husband, Adam, travels to Istanbul and then to London with the great desire to start a new life for their family, whilst Jamila, the other sister, chooses to stay in her humble village to become a midwife. In London, they must choose between adhering to ancient customs and attempting to fit in. The novel's major themes include treachery, obligation, loneliness, and family honour. The themes permeate not just Pembe and Jamila's home, but also society in general, whether it be in Turkey or in London.

The word "post-colonialism" broadly refers to how human identity, culture, and ethnicity are depicted in the modern era, especially when many former colonial countries gain independence, as these countries had long been tied to the colonial empire. “The word imperialism derives from the Latin ‘imperium,’ which has numerous meanings, including power, authority, command, dominion, realm, and empire.” (Habib, 2008). It portrays several interconnections between the terms "coloniser" and "colonised." Post-colonial literature refers to the significant literary and creative output that emerged in former European colonies in Asia, Africa,

and Australia following their independence. Orientalism, by Edward Said, is a genuine investigation into how Western culture depicts Eastern countries under the guise of so-called post-colonial studies.
Gayatri Spivak, for example, introduced the term "postcolonial" to criticise postcolonial literature, which was a collection of literary recollections and interviews published in 1990. Although the influence of colonial representation has been fundamental to critics' work, the term "post-colonial" was initially used to allude to the cultural linkages that existed inside these colonial societies. (e.g., Ashcroft et al. 1977). This was an endeavour, which began in the late 1960s, to highlight some of the concerns surrounding Commonwealth writing and to investigate the so-called new literature in English. Since then, the word "post-colonialism" has evolved to refer to a collection of political, cultural, and linguistic initiatives and experiences of cultures that were formerly European colonies.
"postcolonialism" is conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre-and post-independence nations and communities. While its use has tended to focus on the cultural production of such communities, it is becoming widely used in historical, political, sociological and economic analyses, as these disciplines continue to engage with the impact of European imperialism upon world societies. (Ashcroft et al., 1998)
The Postcolonial contains many motifs and topics that are similar, such as "cultural domination," "racism," "search for identity," and "inequality," as well as some unusual presentation approaches. Most postcolonial writers consider and demonstrate a wide range of thematic concepts related to both "coloniser" and "colonised." Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Said, and Spivak are the key theorists whose names come up again and again as intellectuals who developed postcolonial theory. Despite the fact that all of these writers came from various countries, ethnicities, and social origins, they were all able to carve out their own niche by writing beautiful literary works, many of which would likely be classified as "postcolonial literature".
Antonio Gramsci coined the word "subaltern," which means "of lower status," to define "those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes." (Ashcroft et al., 1998, P. 198). Peasants, labourers, and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic' authority are examples of subaltern classes. Apparently, the subaltern idea is intended to "cut across several kinds of political and cultural binaries, such as colonialism vs. nationalism, or imperialism vs. indigenous cultural expression, in favour of a more general distinction between subaltern and élite" (Ibid., P. 200), for this marginalised minority is frequently disregarded in studies of cultural and political transformation.
Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak is a pioneer in the field of Subaltern studies. She is also a ground-breaking figure in postcolonial studies. She provides in-depth insights into the former colonies' colonial power. She was born in India and educated in the United Kingdom, where her works still have a tremendous influence on the Third World's underprivileged people. Spivak's most well-known work on subalternty is her contentious article "Can the Subaltern Speak?", published in 1988. Her essay's title is ambiguous and deceptive. She believes that even if the subalterns voice their opinions, no one will hear them. She affirms that powerful people in a society, such as religious figures, statesmen, academics, to name a few, would advocate for the oppressed. (Spivak, n.d.) In her article, the word "speak" alludes to the subaltern's voice, which has been taken by the dominant category in any community. Spivak's views on subalternity might be interpreted in a variety of theoretical ways. Graham proposes :
Spivak combines ideas from Marxism* (here an approach critical of capitalist economic exploitation), feminism* (promotion of equality between the sexes), and deconstruction. These specialties help her make an argument about the oppression caused by differences in power, gender, and access to knowledge (٢٠١٧) .
Despite their strong feelings of alienation, isolation, and loneliness, the protagonists of the two novels choose to travel to another setting to pursue their aspirations, and since they feel inferior, ostracised, and weak in their home nations, both of them belong to a social minority. The new nation may provide opportunities that the original country does not. Furthermore, the main characters retain their native culture and feel a sense of familiarity and connection to both cultures. Both cultures do not appear to be independent and distinct, so there is no reason to doubt their commitment to their culture of origin. Another aspect worth mentioning, "when one feels homesick even in her own country but aspires the challenges and surprises in another country, it is as though the outside and inside are blended and the boundary between them is not clear cut." (Shabrang & Karimi, 2020, P. 34). Bhabha explains,

To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself […] in a state of incredulous terror. […] In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting(١٤١ ,٢٠٢١) .

Webster defines unhomeliness as a lack of intimacy or warmth. (2002). It denotes the state of being unhomely. Unhomeliness is a term used in postcolonial literature to describe a place where one might observe how an individual's identity is a blend of the strange or alien with what is identifiable. Homi Bhabha's article "The World and the Home" builds on Freud's idea of the "uncanny" or "unheimlich". In its traditional definition, Freud's "uncanny," or "unhomely," suggests the distanced feeling of experiencing something common but menacing inside the confines of the personal. According to Bhabha, the "unhomely" condition is neither a state of not having a home nor the inverse of having a home, but rather the increasing consciousness that the barrier between the home and world is blurring. Bhabha expresses it similarly, "In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting." (2021, P. 141)

The concept of identity is one of the most significant issues addressed in postcolonial literature. Identity is related to those who used to live in societies dominated by the elite classes or people who relocated to new communities and cultures that differ from the cultures of their original societies. The Oxford English Dictionary defines identity as "the fact of being who or what a person or thing is" or "the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity." (1989, P. 705). In their 2001 book, Beller and Leerssen emphasise that "identity becomes to mean being identifiable, and is closely linked to the idea of 'permanence through time': something remaining identical with itself from moment to moment." (P. 1). Identity takes several shapes and aspects that address various ethnic, social, religious, sexual, and economic concerns, and all of these elements contribute to the construction of an individual's identity. Therefore, identity can imply "a social category or, in the sense of personal identity, distinguishing features of a person that form the basis of his or her dignity or self-respect." (Voicu, 2014, p. 16) Because this study is concerned with the identification of individuals in various cultural communities, cultural identity was prioritised. Cultural identity is defined as :

an individual's realization of his or her place in the spectrum of cultures and purposeful behavior directed on his or her enrollment and acceptance into a particular group, as well as certain characteristic features of a particular group that automatically assign an individual's group membership. (Sysoyev, 2001)

Identity is not the product of self-awareness; rather, it is the recognition given; and an individual's identity may be said to attain its appropriate meaning only when it discovers its relationship with the society and culture to which he or she adheres. In other words, the community in which one lives and the culture of that group are the components that determine a person's identity. The loss of one's identity is a recurring issue in postcolonial studies. Individuals suffering from post-colonial fragmentation of self and identity are stuck between the two cultures of two different groups. According to postcolonial researchers, identity loss is caused by the colonised and the foreign culture of the coloniser. In post-colonial societies, the loss of indigenous peoples' sense of self and identity leads to a crisis of psychological identity and territorial identity, where the former divides a person from others and the latter from places, as in the case of survivors of colonialism.

Discussion

Elif Shafak's novel "Honor" depicts the plight of miserable women in conventional patriarchal countries. The woman represents the family's honour, which she must protect. The man has ultimate authority, and the woman lives in his shadow; the major role of a woman is to bear as many children as possible, particularly sons. A phallocentric society in which everything good belongs to males and everything evil belongs to females. Women are connected with shame, whereas men are associated with honour. Women are badly perceived.

You called your child "honour" as long as it was a boy. "Men had honour." Old men, middle-aged men, even schoolboys so young that they still smelled of their mothers' milk. Women did not have honour; instead, they had shame. And, as everyone knew, shame would be a rather poor name to bear. (Shafak, 2011, p. 20)

Women in these communities reflect negative stereotypes, and these women have transmitted this negative stereotype down through generations until it has become a deeply embedded reality that is not subject to

debate or alteration. Women in these communities are accustomed to it, just as they are comfortable with their names and their minor secondary status in these societies. "It was all because women were made of the lightest cambric,' Naze continued, whereas men were cut of thick, dark fabric. That's how God has tailored the two: one superior to the other." (Ibid., p. 19) In this extract, the mother, Naze, confronts her daughters about the man's dominance. Man is unique in creation, and this must be accepted without question. This is attributed to God's own understanding. In creation, man is strong and woman is weak, as though they were fashioned of light cambric. This supports Spivak's subaltern theory, according to which women are subaltern and inconsequential elements of society. As a result, women must obey society's boundaries and refrain from attempting to modify them or develop their own identities, or they may face repercussions. For Spivak, "subalternity is a position without identity, a position where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action."(2005, p. 476) The community Shafak presents in her novel "Honor" is a Kurdish minority in a tiny village surrounded by a huge Turkish majority. Because this little Kurdish community is completely governed by patriarchy, women are subject to two authorities: the authority of Turkish society and the authority of Kurdish patriarchal society.

The historical context reveals that thousands of Indians worked in the mines of Britain's colonies. Afram illustrates that there was "an early Indian migration of unskilled labour to work on mines and plantations in the British colonies." (2012, p. xii) In "Goat Days," Najeeb, the protagonist, was one of them. After the discovery of oil and the great economic boom, a large number of Indian workers began to travel to the Arabian Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia. Due to the poor working conditions of Indian miners, as well as extreme poverty and political crisis in India and a lack of access to suitable jobs, "after the oil boom in the 1970s, Arab Gulf states witnessed unprecedented waves of migrant labourers seeking jobs and a better life." (Shihada, 2016, p. 3) The majority of Indian immigrants came from Kerala, where the hero Najeeb moved owing to his inability to provide for his family, his mother, and his pregnant wife. The majority of Kerala's immigrants are minorities and subalterns who have been forced to move in pursuit of a better life and a brighter future for their family due to unemployment, poverty, and marginalisation. Apparently, the Gulf states appear to be a suitable possibility to accomplish this desire. Despite their significant contribution to the development of the Gulf nations, immigrants were subjected to a variety of negative behaviours, including slavery, exploitation, forced labour, inequity, abuse, and marginalisation. (Kymlicka & Pföstl, 2014).

Najeeb, the novel's protagonist, experiences "unhomeliness," which is one of the most fundamental concepts in post-colonial theory. Many theorists have addressed this concept, which Tyson characterised as "an emotional state: unhomed people don't feel at home even in their own homes because they don't feel at home in any culture and, therefore, don't feel at home in themselves." (2011, p. 250). It might signify a sense of alienation encountered by individuals when transitioning from one culture to another, an emotional trauma that prompts the individual to think about his previous identity as he becomes lost in the foreign culture that he professes to be his identity. At times, he is conscious of his own worry. Bhabha expresses it this way:

I have lived that moment of scattering of the people that, in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettoes or cafes in city centers; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues or in the uncanny fluency of another's language. (1994, p. 139).

Najeeb, the novel's protagonist, arrived in Saudi Arabia and could not wait for the employer who recruited him because he saw in him the person who would save him from his tragedy; the person who would help him fulfil his aspirations and relieve him of the dread and worry that surrounded his life and the lives of the immigrants alongside him. "Arbab, come fast, how long we have been waiting. Come fast, save us from this fear. Arbab! Arbab! " (Daniel, 2012, p. 31). Najeeb landed in Saudi Arabia after a long journey. He borrowed a large sum of money in order to secure a visa. He also sold his wife's gold and spent significant fees, and many immigrants joined in this pain, seeing in the individuals who employed them hope for survival and a change in their terrible social reality in their homeland. Their objectives were lofty, and they saw their bosses as gods who had come to deliver them from poverty, marginalisation, hardship, and loss.

Whatever it is, an arbab had come for me. I was relieved by the thought. I too have become a Gulf NRI. I too have an arbab of my own. The one who walks in front of me is the custodian of all my dreams, the visible god who would fulfil all my ambitions. My arbab! —at that moment, I could not have liked any other word more! (Ibid., p. 32)

Najeeb's hopes and desires were all but shattered. He did not feel welcome in his new culture. Najeeb's ambitions quickly transformed from aspiration to sad reality. The moment of truth arrived when he found himself alone and alienated in the centre of the Arabian desert. He was separated from his beloved friend Hakim, who had joined him as an emigrant. Najeeb is now cut off from the rest of the world and subjected to humiliation, beatings, and torture. His employer denied him the most basic rights, and he became dependent on bread and water. He is currently in a profound state of dissatisfaction, misery, and remorse. Najeeb's journey to happiness and redemption became a journey to despair, alienation, and contempt; "what dreams I had had! An AC car, An Ac room, a soft mattress with TV in front of it... how far my dreams were from the reality of my situation." (Ibid., p. 42)

The failure of some members of the Toprak family in "Honor" to let go of their past and adapt to a new culture has resulted in doubt, separation, perplexity, alienation, and, eventually, unhomeliness. Adam Toprak, the father and husband, had little interaction with the new society. He confined his contacts to a group of exiles like himself, whom Bhabha calls the "space in between" (1994, p. 2), with whom Adam felt a sense of belonging and protection,

There were unwritten rules here that everyone obeyed. Indians, Pakistanis, Indonesians, Bangladeshis, Caribbeans, Iranians, Turks, Greeks, Italians … Everybody spoke English but swore, conspired and prayed in his mother tongue. The Lair, they called it. Run by a taciturn Chinese family who had lived in Vietnam for generations and been forced to leave after the war (Shafak, 2011, p.39).

Pempi, the novel's protagonist, was subjected to racial prejudice by Westerners, which posed a significant barrier for her, making it impossible for her to adjust to the new society and remain, as Bhabha recounted, within the "otherness".

'Ahem.' The customer standing behind coughed theatrically. Now all heads turned towards him, the silent onlooker. 'I've been observing your eclair crisis,' he said. 'And I feel obliged to say a few words. If the law becomes involved, I'll be the sole witness here.' 'So?' said the assistant. 'So I'll tell them the other side of the story.' 'What other side?' 'That you've mistreated your customer and you haven't served her properly. You were slow, impolite, uncooperative, difficult, even aggressive. (Shafak, 2011, p. 92).

In Goat Days, identity is a persistent source of stress for Najeeb. He is stripped of his actual identity after being alone in the desert. He is all alone and surrounded by goats. And, because the question of identity is critical to each individual's survival, Najeeb attempts to construct his own identity. In the lives of every human being, the past is a permanent identity. He used to name goats after people and important aspects of his life back home, whether social or religious. As he explains, he attempts to compare himself to goats. "I ate the wheat with salt... I slept in the masara with the goats. By then, I had indeed become a goat." (Daniel, 2012, p. 150). In the heart of the vast desert, Najeeb is attempting to reclaim his lost identity. Since identity is a combination of social, religious, and cultural values that comprise an individual's existence, religion becomes a key component of these values when Najeeb begins giving names to the goats that surround him, and these names symbolise religious symbols that Najeeb strongly believes in in his surroundings, "I named the three head goats in the masara Lalitha, Ragini, and Padmini." (Ibid., p. 71).

Najeeb assumes the identity of the goat. Following that, he attempted to associate the names of genuine individuals he had known in his prior life in an attempt to connect with his previous persona. All of this is an attempt to identify his actual identity since he is experiencing an identity crisis. For Najeeb, identity is a set of genuine, comprehensive, and consistent ideals that characterise the individual in a condition of traditional loyalty to his culture. While, as in post-colonial fiction, Najeeb's identity after his arrival in the desert is insecure and fluctuating. (Karkaba, 2010).

Homi Baba has demonstrated the significance of the term "unhomeliness" in creating an identity dilemma for immigrants to Western civilization, as it plays an important role in post-colonial literature. Most of these immigrants do not entirely hybridize, resulting in a psychological and social identity crisis. Tyson underscores "to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (2006, p. 421)

Most of the characters in "Honor" have had to decide whether to keep their identity or to abandon it. The first generation of immigrants was unable to acquire a Western identity and instead adhered to their traditional identity, living closed in on themselves and striving to minimise the impact of their Western identity as much as possible. A prime example of this is Uncle Tariq and his wife:

There was too much indecency in this country; all this nakedness was no good. He couldn't understand for the life of him how some men found pleasure in these publications, and neither could he comprehend the

women who posed in them. Didn't they have families—fathers, husbands, or brothers? He kept the obscene material at the far end of the rack. (Shafak, 2011, p. 122)

Despite their attempts to merge into society and feel no difference, they are suspicious of merging with Western culture and believe that keeping to their original identity is necessary in order to uphold the traditions and practices they were nurtured with. Even his wife, when she confronts a new pattern of contemporary womanhood, leaves numerous indications of exclamation and amazement, which are generated by her first identity, the battle she is living inside between retaining her original identity or giving up her original identity, "she wondered what kind of women they were. What types of families did they come from? Even the women on the cover of the men's magazines didn't surprise her as much as these wives who were not wives" (Ibid., p. 182)

Despite all her attempts to live a contemporary life and despair of a good future in a liberated society, Pempe, the protagonist, was unable to give up her original identity and experienced a painful fight with this, as evidenced by letters she sent to her sister Jamila, "Sister, I've met someone. Please don't frown. Please don't judge me. Give me a chance to explain, though I'm not sure I understand it myself. I cannot confide in anyone but you." (Ibid., p. 155) Homi Bhabha highlights this by referring to it as "liminal space." The novel's major characters are in a state of conflicted emotions, which Loomba refers to as a state of contradiction, "Colonial identities—on both sides of the divide—are unstable, agonized, and in constant flux" (2007, p. 149).

Conclusion

Daniel Benjamin's Goat Days, 2008, and Elif Shafak's Honor, 2011, give insight on certain key themes in postcolonial literature. The characters in the two novels are members of minorities and subaltern groups, and they experience marginalisation in their original communities. In both works, migration to more evolved cultures was portrayed as the only option for characters to achieve genuine opportunities and secure a promising future for their families. However, in the new cultures, they were subjected to a form of unhomeliness, making it impossible for them to maintain their original identity or fit into Western civilization.

Najeeb, the main character of Goat Days, has suffered harsh working conditions in his country's mines. He thought that reaching the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia, would provide an excellent opportunity to build stability and secure his family's future. When he landed in Saudi Arabia, he was subjected to various sorts of torture and was forced to live in the midst of the vast desert, herding goats. He was mocked, tormented, and enslaved, and he felt distant and separated from his own identity, to the point that he described himself as a goat.

In "Honor," Shafak portrays a Kurdish minority living in Turkey who is marginalized, particularly women who are oppressed by patriarchy and its rigid rules. The Toprak family moved to Istanbul and then to London in search of a secure life and a bright future. The Toprak family had enormous challenges in London, most notably adjusting to a new culture and way of life that contrasted with the values and objectives of their native civilization. The first generation of emigrants could not hybridise with the new culture, making maintaining their own identity incredibly difficult.

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