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THE "OTHER" SIDE OF BHABHAS'S HYBRIDITY: THE INSTANCE OF AADAM AZIZ IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

SAMITA MISHRA[1], Dr SHRUTI DAS[2]

[1]Research Scholar, P.G. Dept. of English, Berhampur University
[2]Reader and Head, P.G. Dept. of English, Berhampur University

SAMITA MISHRA

ABSTRACT

In Homi K. Bhabha's discourse on the colonial condition hybridity is a central concept that affects both the coloniser and the colonized. The hybridity of the colonial subject is far from being an enviable achievement. Fanon has dealt black passionately with the sad consequences when the colonial subject internalizes a desire for the coloniser's whiteness and a dislike for his own blackness. Access to the coloniser's system of education makes him different from his own people. But this "difference" does not ensure "sameness" with the colonizer. This realization- he can never attain the whiteness he desires and never shed the blackness he disparages- creates an irrepairable chasm within him. The promise of being in two places at once turns out to be a "dissembling" affair. Having lost faith in his own civilization, he becomes "an abandonment neurotic", a compulsive rejecter of his own culture. He becomes an anomaly "the White man's artifice inscribed on the Black man's body". So Terry Collins dismisses this so called hybridity as a "violated authenticity". Rushdie's Aadam Aziz has his authentic identity violated after five years of medical education in Hiedelburg, Germany. It is metaphorically represented by the image of a "hole" within him, "a vacancy in a vital inner chamber". His whole life had been a quest for a supplement to fill this inner emptiness. The fragmented image of Naseem vouchsafed to him through the perforated sheet appears to be the desired supplement. He made the mistake of taking the collection of the sectioned vision of Naseem for the whole and suffered all his life. He dies a devastated man, literally cracking till his skeleton disintegrates inside the "weather-beaten sack of his skin".

Issues of hybridity, creolisation, mestizaje with emphasis on crossovers of ideas and identities during colonial rule are major preoccupations of postcolonial studies. Technically a hybrid is a cross between two different species. So Robert Young tells that hybridisation evokes both the botanical notion of inter-species grafting and the view of the Victorian extreme right of different races as different species. Postcolonial theory challenges this Victorian racist ideology because colonial policy deliberately encouraged crossovers. Pedro Fermin de Vargas, in fact, advocated interbreeding between whites and Indians to "hispanicise" and finally "extinguish" Indians (qtd. in Anderson:13). Colonial educational policy, which aimed to create Europeanised natives or to use Macaulay's word "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in

intellect", is described by Benedict Anderson as "mental miscegenation" (13). Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" reminds us that neither coloniser nor the colonised is independent of the other. Colonial identities are unstable, agonised and in constant flux. This applies both to the coloniser and the colonised. Our concern here is on the "other" side i.e. the side of the colonised who is always articulated as "the other" of the colonisers. Fanon's image of black skin/white mask is an apt description of this colonial subject. He internalises a desire for the coloniser's whiteness and a dislike for his own blackness. Educated like the colonisers in their system he is always conscious of his difference from his own people But this "difference", Bhabha reminds us, does not ensure "sameness" with the coloniser. This realisation - he can never attain the whiteness he desires nor shed the blackness he disparages - creates an irrepairable chasm within him. The promise of being in two places at once turns out to be a "dissembling" affair. Having lost his faith in his own civilisation, he becomes an "abandonment neurotic" a compulsive rejector of his own culture. He becomes an anomaly "the White man's artifice inscribed on the Black man's body" (112). Terry Collits, therefore, dismisses this so called hybridily as a "violated authentity "(61). Aadam Aziz in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is an illustration of the sad consequences of this violated authenticity.

Doctor Aziz had five years of medical education in Germany. The influence of metropolitan life on him is clearly indicated in the "stacked copies of Vorwarts and Lenin's *What Is To Be Done* and other pamphlets, dusty echoes of his half faded German life" (*16)*. He is the "mimic man" whose exposure to European education far from ensuring a cultural enrichment rather opened up a hole inside him, a fissure in his relationship with his own self and his society. An unconscious victim of colonial ambivalence, he lived his whole life with a split identity. When he returned to Kashmir after staying in Germany for five years, he "saw things differently" (5). Saleem Sinai reports:

> To reveal the secret of my grandfather's altered vision: he had spent five years, five springs, away from home. Now, returning he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed. He also felt inexplicably as though the old place resented his educated, stethescoped return. Beneath the winter ice, it had been coldly neutral, but now there was no doubt; the years in Germany had returned him to a hostile environment (6).

The return to Kashmir was not accompanied by a congenial blissful feeling of homecoming. He felt utterly enclosed. His old place appeared to have resented his education. His exposure to the education of the colonizer was represented by the stethoscope which stuck to him and became an essential adjunct of his. The beauty of the valley no longer impressed him; rather, he was troubled by a sense of narrowness and the proximity of the horizon. The land had always been coldly neutral but now, after his German education, he found his environment openly hostile.

He had many friends in Germany. But for all their intimacy he was always reminded of his physical peculiarities and the fact that he belonged to an inferior civilization. Saleem tells of Aziz's stay in "Heidelberg, in which, along with medicine and politics, he learned that India like radium had been 'discovered' by the Europeans" (6). His friends in Germany told Aziz that "he was somehow the invention of their ancestors" (6). Aadam Aziz's experience was, therefore, not much different from Fanon's experience under French imperialism. A sense of inferiority was permanently inflicted upon him which all the years of European education could not erase. His friends in Heidelberg mocked his prayer with their anti-ideologies and Ingrid scorned the Mecca turned parroting. All these only expose the duplicity of the colonial civilizing mission.

On his return to Kashmir, Doctor Aziz tries to pray "attempting to reunite himself with an earlier self which ignored their influence" (6):

> But it was no good, he was caught in a strange middle ground, trapped between belief and disbelief, and this was only a charade after all …And was knocked forever into that middle place, unable

to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration: a hole (7).

The influence of his Western education comes out clearly in his dismissal of the elaborate Muslim ritual of prayer as a "charade". He became a "half –halfer", trapped between belief and disbelief. He could not pray with his old sincerity. The prayer "comforted a part of him, made another larger part feel uneasy" (6). In such a state of mind he

> hit his nose against a frost- hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly … the tears which had sprung to his eyes had solidified, too; and at the moment … he resolved never again to kiss earth for any god or man. This decision, however, made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history (4).

One of the obvious effects of Doctor Aziz's contact with the colonial civilization is the subversion of traditional values as evident in the excerpt above. The traditional connection of blood spilled during a religious ritual is that of fertility "since it establishes a link between the divine and the human" (Ferber 100). But there is a subversion of this traditional connotation here: the hardening of the blood signifies the loss of faith, which is related to the appearance of the hole. After bumping his nose on the ground in his effort to pray, Doctor Aziz decides not to bow his head again before God or man. By rejecting his faith, Aadam Aziz opens up a void within him. From this moment till his end, his life has been a quest for the supplement to fill the inner emptiness. The supplement arrives with the fragmented image of Naseem through a perforated sheet. When the young doctor meets his female patient for the first time he finds her "holding one corner of an enormous white bed-sheet…in the very center of the sheet, a hole had been cut, a crude circle about seven inches in diameter"(22). But the image of the perforated sheet is ambivalent with indeterminate connotation. Intended to serve as a means of protection, the sheet gradually acquires a communicative ability.

Naseem girl keeps having health problems but they never occur in the part of the body which has been treated once. Under the influence of the gradual uncovering of the body severally before his eyes, the doctor is haunted by a dream in which he sees the glued image of the girl:

> My grandfather had fallen in love, and had come to think of the perforated sheet as something sacred and magical, because through it he had seen the things which had filled up the hole inside him which had been created when he had been hit on the nose by a tussock and insulted by the boatman Tai (28).

But the love itself is occasioned by a strange reversal. Instead of the blushing face of the girl, it is the blushing bottom which the doctor was vouchsafed to view through the perforated sheet that made him fall in love with his patient. This irony of the inception of love pervades the entire relationship between the doctor and his wife. The supposedly hidden beauty gets transformed into a stubborn monster and their conjugal life is doomed from the start. Thus the immediately recognizable figures of the beauty and the beast of fairy tales are subjected to subversion.

The steadily declining relationship between the doctor and his young wife is the result of the doctor's altered vision. It started when the doctor asked Naseem to move like a woman in the bed for a normal sexual relationship and she objected to it as an outlandish idea imported from his German friends. He wanted Naseem to come out of purdah but Naseem would not relent. Aadam Aziz argued. "Your shirt covers you from neck to wrist to knee. Your loose pajamas hide you down to and including your ankles. What we have left are your feet and face. Wife are your feet and face obscene?" (38). She wails- "They will see more than that! They will see my deep deep shame" (38). Doctor Aziz loses his temper, drags all his wife's purdah veils from the suitcase and sets fire to them. Their entire married life became a virtual warfare. Saleem writes:

> This was a battle my grandfather never won. It set the tone for their marriage, which rapidly developed into a place of frequent and devastating warfare, under

> whose depredations the young girl behind the sheet and the gauche young doctor turned rapidly into different stranger beings (38).

Aadam wants his wife to "forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a modern Indian woman" (39). But this would never happen. Naseem's revenge on Aziz for his new fangled ideas would start soon. It began when Aziz, who was free from religious bigotry, dismissed the religious teacher to their children because he was teaching them to hate vegetarians and people of other religions. This resulted in a bitter quarrel with his wife and she screamed "I swear no food will come from my kitchen to your lips" (50). The doctor also refused to eat unless his wife served him food. "The war of starvation which began that day nearly became a duel to the death…Aziz's face acquired craters, even his nose appeared to be getting thinner. His body had become a battlefield and each day a piece of it was blasted away" (51).

The war between husband and wife intensified when Doctor Aziz decided to provide shelter to Nadeem Khan, the secretary to Mian Abdullah who was killed by a band of hired assassins. Naseem objected to this potentially dangerous decision of keeping a stranger, a young man in a house with three young daughters. Doctor Aziz's Germany trained metropolitan attitude saw nothing wrong in providing shelter to a young man in distress. He would not listen to his wife's remonstrance. As a result Naseem took the crazy oath of not talking to her husband the rest of her life. Saleem describes:

> while Nadir Khan hid in his halflit underworld, his hostess hid too, behind a deafening wall of soundlessness. At first my grandfather probed the wall, looking for chinks, he found none. At last he gave up, and waited for her sentences to offer up their glimpse of her self, just as once he had lusted after the brief fragments of her body he had seen through a perforated sheet; and the silence filled the house, from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, so that the flies seemed to give up buzzing and mosquitoes refrained from humming before they bit; silence stilling the hissing of geese in the courtyard. (66)

Thus the silence of a grave reigned the house. Doctor Aziz's personal life was marred by constant conflicts between his wife's conservatism and his own altered vision.

The havoc that his Germany years wreaked upon him was apparent immediately after his arrival. He found the seemingly immutable order of his family turned upside down, "his mother going out to work while his father sat hidden behind the veil which the stroke had dropped over his brain" (7). So Doctor Aziz was "racked by ambiguity" (50). He was estranged from his own people. He saw the old boatmen Tai's increasing animosity towards him. "Tai branded him as an alien, and therefore a person not completely to be trusted" (30). Aadam Aziz who as a child had chatted freely with fishwives and flower sellers, found himself looked at askance. "They did not like the boatman, but they found the transformation which the doctor had evidently worked upon him even more disturbing. Aziz found himself suspected, even ostracized by the poor and it hurt him badly" (30).

Ostracized by his old acquaintances in Kashmir, a stranger to his wife all his life, the amiable doctor dies a devastated man. The final breakdown comes when his son Hanif commits suicide. On the twenty second day of the mourning Doctor Aziz claimed that he saw God. He asked God why he made his son die. God's answer "God has his reason, old man; life's like that, right" (384) convinced Aadam that because he never believed in God, He stole his son. So somewhere in the depths of his senility the idea took root that "God, by his off-hand attitude to Hanif's suicide, had proved his own culpability in the affair" (384).Aadam Aziz had begun to crack. His skin began to split and flake and peel. He could hardly open his mouth to eat because of the cuts in the corners of his lips. Finally his skeleton disintegrated into powder inside "the weather-beaten sack of his skin" (382).

He never forgave God, was rather filled with a drooling passionate desire for revenge. "In the remaining years of his life he often disgraced himself by stumbling into mosques and temples with his old man's stick, mouthing imprecations and lashing out

at any worshipper or holy man within his range" (384). He continued like this for some time. Then on the Christmas Day he suddenly left for Kashmir without the knowledge of others. He fell in the temple of Shankar Acharya and died. His body was too fragile to be transported. So he was buried in the valley of his birth.

The ambivalence of hybridization is foregrounded in the life of Aadam Aziz. His years in Germany disabled him completely because he renounced his religious faith. This created a hole within him and he tried to supplement it by love for Naseem. But he only had a "sectioned" vision of Naseem and made the mistake of taking the collection of sections for the whole. It was as though; "There marriage had been one of those mythical unions in which succubi appear to men as innocent damsels, and , after luring them into the matrimonial bed, regain their true, awful aspect and begin to swallow their souls…"(381).

The crossover between two cultures that the hybridized colonial subject is supposed to represent never takes place. Aziz dedicates himself 'to an attempt to fuse the skills of westen and hakimi medicins". But the attempt wore him down "convincing him that the hegemony of superstition, Mumbai jumbo and all things magical would never be broken in India"(SS). What Doctor suffered in stead was a "violated authentscity", a loss of faith in his own religion which ultimately proved to be his undoing.

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