



RESEARCH PAPER

**Reclaiming the Lost Glory of Home: A Post-Colonial Study of
The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack**

Dr. Amna Saeed ¹ Dr. Fasih Ahmed ² Ammara Syed ³

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Islamabad, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Islamabad, Pakistan
3. Research Scholar, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Islamabad, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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**Corresponding
Author:**
doctor.amna9@
gmail.com

The aim of the present study is to explore the notion of reclamation of the lost grandeur of *home* in the symbolic representation of the city Karachi in the novel *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack* (2019) written by H.M Naqvi. The textual analysis uses the theoretical framework taken from Homi K Bhabha's postcolonial concept of 'unhomeliness'. *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack* (2019) is selected as a frame of reference for the purpose of study. The aim is to see how literature has hailed the past glories of the city and it is concluded from the analysis that through personification, symbolism, cultural markers and language used the author tries to regain the nostalgic glory that was once associated with the city and which thus provided the sense of pride and belongingness as *home*

Introduction

The objective of the present study is to highlight the motif of reclamation of the lost glory of cultural grandeur, heritage and traditions of *home* city; Karachi as portrayed in Naqvi's *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack* (2019). The study also aims to explore the different literary devices and techniques used to portray the notion of reclamation of lost grandeur of the city. The study also aims to throw light on the historical perspective of Karachi by revisiting the past. The frame of reference of the current study is a novel, *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack*(2019) written by H.M Naqvi. The rationale behind the study is to reclaim the past grandeur of the city through literature. The loss of cultural values and the

mystical grandeur of the city Karachi reflects on the widespread environmental and cultural deterioration of the present day and it is but natural for us to seek a revival of those by delving into the past achievements that connected us with not just our values and culture but also provided a rationale for us to cling to the idea of belonging to a peaceful proud place called *home*. For instance the architectural decay and functional changes of the heritage buildings in Karachi have also caused a loss of the historical grandeur of the said structures (Soomro, Kanwal & Soomro, 2019). The result is therefore pathos and a nostalgia for the revival of the lost cultural glory.

The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack (2019) is based on protagonist Abdullah who is a personification of one of the liveliest metropolitan areas of the world, Karachi. So the obvious setting of the novel is the Karachi. Abdullah, a septuagenarian wakes up on his seventieth birthday and goes to his lodge's balcony. The story starts with his launch in the balcony of his lodge. He spent his life compiling the Mythopoetic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA). After years of expenditure on compiling the Mythopoetic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA) feels nostalgic about the jazz of the city and some real life anxieties make him lose zeal in a big city like Karachi. He feels his life without love, purpose and meaning. Therefore, the story proceeds with the quest for love in the figure of Juggun, purpose in retrieving the 'home', an ancestral legacy prevented from being sold out and, meaning by mentoring a young lad, Bosco (grandson of a friend), and writing about the forgotten talent of Layari, Rambo (flyweight).

Thesis Statement

The novel *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack*(2019) delves profoundly into the nostalgia for the past. It has depicted the past magnificence of the city along with the portrayal of the present day deterioration of socio-cultural values of Karachi. The novel is used as a medium to reclaim the bygone majesty of the city based on its mystical and cultural past since the decay of heritage, historical buildings, destruction of environment all lead to the decay of socio-cultural values as well. Different tools and literary techniques are used to portray the motif of retrieving the lost splendour of the city. Literature is a medium through which the intellectuals bring forth the discourses which need contemplation and attention about the un thoughtful scenarios. Similar is the effort seen in H.M Naqvi's novel which hails the glories of Karachi which has been lost somewhere in the megalopolis transition. The main focus of the study is to trace and delineate the motif of reclamation of the lost grandeur of the city portrayed in the novel through different techniques and literary devices.

Research Questions

1. How is the lost socio-cultural glory of Karachi as *home* reclaimed in the novel?

2. Which literary devices and techniques unfold the motif of reclamation of lost grandeur of the city/ home?

Unhomeliness and The Repressed Histories

Homi K Bhabha is one of the most important theorists in postcolonial studies. He has coined many concepts like hybridity, liminality, mimicry and ambivalence. Among these concepts, he introduced the concept of 'unhomeliness'. The concept of *unhomeliness* is different from homelessness. *Unhomeliness* does not mean homelessness. It means the physical presence of home and being physically at home but not being able to feel like being at home. According to Bhabha, 'the unhomely moment creeps up stealthily as one's own shadow' and suddenly one finds him/herself 'in a state of incredulous terror' (2012). It is 'a condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation' and a 'relocation of the home and the world' i-e 'a shock of recognition of the world-in-home, the home-in-the-world' (Bhabha, 2012). Furthermore, Lois Tyson elaborates that being 'unhomely' is different from being homeless.

Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness echoes with the Freudian concept of 'uncanny'. Freud used a term, 'unheimlich' meaning unhomely. Huddart (2006) elaborates the Bhabha's borrowing of word 'uncanny' from Freudian viewpoint, the uncanny contains the opposite, 'if the canny is the home it none the less has a tendency to morph into the profoundly unfamiliar, the 'unhomely', which alienates and estranges us from what we thought was most properly our own. 'Living with uncanny ability to live at home is an ability that might always become a burden of having no home'.

Freud argues that 'for this the uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (Suyoufie, 2005). According to Freud 'any repression is necessarily incomplete, and so any past is always just about to break through into the present. For psychoanalysis the traces of past beliefs and experiences remain present in the mind and Freud called it 'omnipotence of the thoughts'. Uncanny arises from the 'repression of our supposedly primitive beliefs'. These 'repressed histories' is a sense of belonging that comes back to consciousness and questions the present. This unhomely echo of histories that modernity might have preferred had remained hidden (Huddart, 2006). 'The memory that survived from the past exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present' (McLeod, 2000). A balance through the uncanny can be attained by 'gathering the memories of underdevelopment, gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.' Bhabha said uncanniness is the repetition of 'lived life introducing difference and transformation'. Furthermore, this difference in repetition 'is a way of reviving the past, of keeping it alive in the present' (Bhabha, 2012).

Bhabha then further elaborates that ‘the private (self) and public (other), past and present, psyche and social develop an interstitial Intimacy. These spheres of life are linked through an in-between temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history’. It means the connection is uncanny one. This in-between space is a communal space which leads to the exploration of ‘interpersonal reality, aesthetically distanced, held back, and yet historically framed’. Goethe says, one cannot go back to the past because now he/she has ‘settled...without noticing’ that he/she ‘had learned many foreign ideas and ways’ which had been ‘unconsciously adopted’ (Bhabha, 2012).

Bhabha (1992) further argued that the ‘act of writing the world’ must be ‘fully realised presence of haunting’ history. He said that ‘in the House of Fiction one can hear the deep stirring of unhomeliness’. ‘The disjunction between past and present, between here and there, makes home seem far removed in time and space, available for return only through an act of imagination’ (McLeod, 2000). This act of imagining the past, is then written down representing the theme of unhomeliness. Moreover, modernity is a repression of origins leading to an unhomely state in the characters of fiction. Bhabha connected the unhomely state to cosmopolitanism and called it as ‘vernacular’ cosmopolitanism, which opens ‘ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home’ (Bhabha, 2012).

Material and Methods

The researcher has used Homi K Bhabha’s notion of ‘*unhomeliness*’ to shed light on the reclamation of the lost glory of Karachi depicted in the novel through different literary techniques and devices. The purpose is attained by using textual analysis proposed by Catherine Belsey. According to Belsey, textual analysis ‘involves a close encounter with the work itself, without bringing to them more presuppositions’. The text is to be read first which is to be followed by the questions of the researcher. The text always has a relation with the context and understanding this relationship helps to pose meaningful questions. The meaning of the text is embedded in multiple layers forming a complex relation. The process of ‘signification’ i-e the relation between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ is to be analysed and evaluated using sources of knowledge (theories) by looking profoundly into the literary techniques employed by the authors. In this way, the implicit meanings manifested through literature are unearthed (Griffin, 2005). *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack* (2019) by H.M Naqvi is the novel which is chosen as a frame of reference to reclaim the lost glory of mage city Karachi.

Reclaiming of Lost Home in *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack*

“The great Pakistani city of Karachi, says the titular narrator of H.M. Naqvi’s *The Selected Works of Abdullah the Cossack* (2019), was once a cultural mecca . . . That boisterous entrepot is long since gone...yet it survives in the memory of the novel’s aging hero, and in this delirious love letter to the Karachi that was...Thrust into wheezing, hobbling action, Abdullah protects his friends and confronts his adversaries with a boldness and verbosity” (Sacks, 2019).

The protagonist Abdullah of the novel is a *personification* of the city Karachi as *home*. 'He is a self-educated, self-styled academic...trying to begin some sort of project pertaining to aspects of intellectual history'. He broods on the lost jazz of the city by 'mulling over the mythopoeic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi'. He used to be at the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi on every 'Thursday night inhaling hashish amongst...fortune tellers, body builders, thugs, troubadours, transvestites, women & sweet, rowdy children. I am at home there' (TSWOATC). The 'fatihah and quls' recitation at funerals, 'positioning the corpse' projecting tents, 'the chairs arranged in rows, the audio system setup for the presiding maulvi' and attending 'condolence calls' gives an insight into old Karachi. The 'drums sound in the compound' at every evening in Sehwan where there was 'the seat of greatest saints, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, 'commemorated Muharram' where the inhabitants pervade their houses 'with the sweet scent of burning incense sticks' was also drawing a glorious picture of Karachi. The commemoration of different sufi saints 'with song and dance until the day breaks' and 'the qawwals' singing 'modern masterpiece...Sakhtmushkilmeinhan, gham se haray hue, viz., We are in trouble Lordy, defeated by despondency' (TSWOATC) at the shrines gives a glimpse of old glorious Karachi.

The past of Karachi is reclaimed through different strands in the novel. Symbolism is one of the major strands in the novel for the reclamation of past glory. The Mythopoeic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA) symbolises the old Karachi with its glories depicted by a seventy-year old septuagenarian man known as Abdullah the Cossack. Abdullah mentions in the beginning that he is, 'phenomenologist than a historian, less concerned with who did What & What Happened When than with the more discreet, indeed noble investigations- nary the chotachota but the motamota. For instance, the mythopoeic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA), the patron saint of my city is one of the matters hitherto ignored by historians, pundits and punters alike, suggesting a variety of perversity that eclipses the newsworthy issues that vex the denizens of our Broad Swath of the World'. It is as if in this savage, insensible, this distracted age we have become obsessed with anecdotal indicators, hermeneutic lint, ignoring What Makes Us What We Are, indeed, What Makes the World What It Is'. (TSWOAT)

Abdullah symbolises the old generation, who is nostalgic about the past glories of his city. It is this nostalgia, the absence of the past, which gives him a sense of 'unhomeliness' in the new Karachi 'home'. At every sight of new Karachi the old glories creep within his consciousness thus reclaiming the past grandeur of Karachi. The 'architectural delights scattered across the old city' has been levelled by land mafia which inculcates a sense of 'unhomely' in Abdullah. The transformation of 'Three Star Accommodation' into Hotel Grand and Gandhi Garden's alteration hovers a sense of 'unhomeliness' in Abdullah.

Abdullah's quest for 'mulling over a project, some permutation of the Mythopoeic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA)' is highly symbolic. Everytime he is in any kind of danger or even on a death bed Abdullah is reminded of the

sublime project of writing the Mythopoetic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA). When he has dengue fever, he broods on a thought that, 'there is much to be done: securing patrimony, matrimony, Bosco's security, The Mythopoetic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi'. (TSWOATC)

These two purposes are central to the character of Abdullah. Abdullah while acting as a mentor for 'character building' symbolises his present where he has to survive and writing an intellectual Legacy on Abdullah Shah Ghazi symbolises the past which is more glorified and homely to him thus protecting him from feeling 'unhomely'. Every time he is in his present the 'unhomely' feelings creep in and he goes back to his past to negotiate in the new Karachi. Before going, Layari, Abdullah visits the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA). Bosco asks about the shrine and its importance, he replies that 'Five men, good men, honourable men, brothers, settled here a millennium ago...Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA) was one of them. We protected him and now he protects us' (TSWOATC). It is a protection from being soaked in the present lost grandeur of the city. It helps Abdullah to cling to the past and relieves the unhomely state of present.

This sense of reminiscing the past and its glories protects him from being lost and helps him to negotiate in the new Karachi. For Abdullah, reviving the past is the only way to negotiate in new Karachi. At the end of the novel, Abdullah's visit to the shrine is very symbolic as it shows that he satisfies his 'unhomely' feelings only by revisiting the past glorious Karachi of Abdullah Shah Ghazi (RA). His visit with the family to the 'Uncle Jinnah's Mausoleum' is a revival of past, Karachi was the city which had inhabited by all the leaders after migration from India including Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Abdullah recognises 'the-world-in-home' and Boscorecognises 'home-in-the-world'. There is a juxtaposition of past and present, old and new generation in the manifestations of these two characters. Abdullah, symbolic of the old generation trying to negotiate in new Karachi is juxtaposed to Bosco, who is symbolic of the new generation also trying to negotiate in new Karachi.

The polarization between old and new generations symbolising old and new Karachi bears the concept of 'homeliness and unhomeliness'. The unhomely feelings of both the characters; Abdullah and Bosco, are commonly shared thus connecting them in a perfect relationship of mentoring and ease. Abdullah succeeded in negotiating the unhomely feelings in Karachi by revisiting the past, visiting the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi, writing about the 'Mythopoetic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi' and 'forgotten heroes of Layari'. The unhomely feelings are overcome by Abdullah through his writing. He strongly realises Layari as 'motherland of many heroes' which now has become a motherland of 'land mafias'. He writes about one of the forgotten heroes, Rambo of Layari in a magazine to revive the glory of heroes and land. Bosco, on the other hand, succeeded in negotiating the unhomely feelings by keeping 'yo-yo' with himself and towards the end of the novel leaves Karachi and settles abroad (Australia).

Yo-yo symbolises the change in the character of Bosco. The change that lies in the preferences of Abdullah and Bosco on one level and on the other level refers to the change that has occurred in Bosco particularly. Bosco comes back to Karachi after a long time with his family, he finds a change and variation within himself due to Uncle Cossack's words, he admits 'I was displaced as a teenager, floundering. Uncle Cossack took me under his wing and guided me as best he could. It's rare in this 'savage, insensible, distracted age' for somebody to just care.'

The home is reclaimed through language as well. Abdullah inculcates Gujrati, 'tamaykaimcho? You okay?' on his visit to Layari. Abdullah has this taste of using urdu language to convey the complete essence of the message. Once a fortune-teller tells him that 'tum lambi race kayghore ho. You are the horse of long race' to give a tinge of true essence of the phrase. More intimately on the word level the language is used to create an impact of glorious past like 'Radi-wallah', 'Sayein', 'Horki al eh', 'razibazi' and 'Ninni time, bachon!' 'Anokhaymian, Master unusual'.

Moreover, Abdullah once reveals that even the 'children's nursery rhymes' has become 'uncanny'. 'The last time I was over, the childoos would not stop singing that ode to Marine life: Machlijalki rani hai/jeevanoskapanihai/ Hath lagaogey, darjayegi/ Baharnikalogey, mar jayegi.' All these impart to the reclamation of the lost grandeur of Karachi.

Conclusion

To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity (Bhabha, 2012).

Summing up the whole discussion in the light of Bhabha's concept of 'unhomeliness' analysed through the textual analysis proposed by Catherine Belsey, it can be said that the novel in its symbolic depiction of characters; Abdullah and Bosco, the cultural markers portraying the historical perspective of the city and language; all combine together to achieve the motif of reclamation of old glory of Karachi. Two characters are juxtaposed to fulfil the purpose of reclamation of past. Abdullah, personifying Karachi and symbolising the old generation, feels 'unhomely' so he tries to negotiate and retrieve the past Karachi, by 'mulling over the project' of writing the Mythopoetic Legacy of Abdullah Shah Ghazi, in order to feel at home. On the other hand, Bosco, symbolising the new generation, feels 'unhomely' so he tries to negotiate and escape by going abroad in order to feel home. Cultural markers like Quaid e Azam's tomb and the native language used in the novel has contributed to achieve the motif of reclamation of past grandeur of Karachi.

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