

Identity and Representation of Women by a Woman Writer: an Analytical Study of Niaz Zaman's *The Dance and Other Stories*

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Abstract: This paper attempts to incite the issues of identity, representation and double colonization in the short stories of Niaz Zaman, an anasporic woman fiction writer in English of Bangladesh, where the focus will also be on the perspective of a woman writer whose characters are also women and on how a woman is looking and presenting other women since that shows and also goes to the very core of the crisis women face in this post colonial era. Bela's dance and sexual intercourse with the mysterious 'Suraj' in "The Dance" unwraps the possibility of a girl's freedom of choice over getting and accepting pleasure of both mind and body; Nargis's escape from the ties of love and patriarchy only to free herself and let herself be what she wants in "A Study in Black and White" unravels the new beginning for the woman writers and artists as the women have to cross the border of struggles doubly; Bhabi's stand against or for the racial attitude towards girls' skin in terms of marriage in "Ali's Bride" gives a new arena of discussion on the outlook of society towards men (no matter normal or abnormal) and their needs and the position of the poor ugly girls and the possibility and impossibility of sisterhood. How much those mentioned and unmentioned characters from different stories of the book *The Dance and Other Stories* of Niaz Zaman emanate new hopes and new future of endless possibilities in both literature and in patriarchic society for women is also discussed about in this paper.

Keywords: Double Colonization, Identity, Representation, Anasporic English Writer

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Love me but do not try to possess me, body and soul." (Zaman 22)

"There is always music for those who hear." (Zaman 05)

"Without looks, without education, without any money, how did you think she would exist?" (Zaman 33)

Zaman's presentation of woman characters not only manifests the discovery of society's inherent ideological politics which hold women backwards and try to confine them but also evokes the possibility of resistance against those ideologies and of creation of their own individual identities. *The Dance and Other Stories* was first published in 1996 though the stories of this book have been written over a period of twenty-five years where the writer pictures the lives of women in the context of post colonial Bangladesh.

II. DOUBLE COLONIZATION AND IDENTITY IN "A STUDY IN BLACK AND WHITE"

"A Study in Black and White" is a story of an artist, a female artist who steps forward to enjoy her freedom as an artist and celebrates being 'different' and 'weird' in the society of post colonial era where a woman is treated as a woman, not a human being, as she is colonized doubly. In the story, Nargis is shown as an individual character because she knows herself and understands the needs of her soul. Nargis was not ready to be 'possessed' in the name of love or responsibility or anything else because she is well aware of the fact that a man wants to take the woman of his life as his own property. The revolt of Nargis throughout the story is against that possession. She cannot lose herself for a lover, for husband, for family or for society. Here, in the story, we find two versions of Nargis. The previous Nargis was grateful to Rashid as he married her and rescued her from the mockery of her own family and the society. Not only Nargis but also Shameem thinks that she has been saved as her own people are not ready to accept her as she is. In her words:

I felt grateful to him for taking me out of the house and treating me like sane human being. He encouraged me to write. He didn't laugh at my poems. Nor did he make fun of my impractical nature. He seemed to understand me. (Zaman 17)

Again she says:

Yes, in a way I am happy. He is my other half. My practical, worldly, material side. He keeps me from losing myself in a world of airy nothingness. But I have also told you that above all I am myself and I need to be myself and at times I am sad because I am myself. But yes, I am happy with him. (Zaman 19)

Rashid was necessary for her existence as he completes the impractical side of hers. "Rashid is very different from me and at the same time, he's very necessary. I should be lost without him." (Zaman 17). But later another Nargis is discovered who is not afraid to face the society alone and she earned strength only by herself which makes her leave her husband only for being herself:

After all I had told you about his being necessary to me? But I had also told you that, above all, I must be true to myself. Rashid forgot that too often. He tried to change me, to mould me to the type of person he was. I couldn't stand that any longer. So one day I walked out of his house. And now, for the first time, I am free to be myself, do what I want. I can lock myself for hours and write or just be alone with my thoughts. (Zaman 21-22)

This can be interpreted in this way that when she was in her father's house she was not economically independent but later through writing she was able to take the step of leaving those ties. It is very necessary for a woman to have economic strength because through that she will acquire the independence to liberate herself. Here Zaman not only portrays Nargis as a strong woman but also depicts the nature of an artist. For Nargis and to Nargis she herself was only important.

Later, Nargis's relationship with Javed is very significant because here she takes her own decision whether to continue or not both physically and mentally. When Javed, in spite of knowing Nargis very well, was also trying to impose some boundaries in the name of love, Nargis responds saying, "I am the most important thing in my life. I will take everything I need, love, the words you speak, your moods, your emotions, if I think it necessary." (Zaman 23). The growth and maturity of an artist helped a woman to liberate herself from those shackles. The artist Nargis forgets her inferior position of being a woman and bluntly announces her existence saying:

I belong to a different type of people. We have our own rules, our own morality, our own religion. We will lie, steal, kill even but always to preserve what we feel is truth, reality. Our greatest sin is failure to create. If I married you, you would expect me to be first and foremost your wife, perhaps only your wife. We can always be together but I cannot lose myself, my creating being in you. (Zaman 23)

"We too were one but then

I tore myself away:

I knew I could not lose

My soul in you." (Zaman 24)

These were the farewell words of Nargis to Javed. The spirit of Nargis is what is needed for girl's liberation. External force, steps are necessary to encourage the women but what about the internal force? Are the women thinking freely, thinking to be free? Character like Nargis should be highlighted that if a woman artist feels for freedom she should act to let herself be free from all the burdens to be creative. Like Nora, Nargis prefers her own freedom rather than anything else in her life.

III. SURPASSING TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN "THE DANCE"

On the other hand, "The Dance" is not a mere story of a dance of a village girl rather a story of a dance of freedom. In the story, a married village girl dances naked in an open field at night for the sake of village's welfare and consummates with a stranger for the sake of her own desire. Here it is important to focus on the concept of 'good girl' and 'bad girl'. Society's concept of 'good girl' and 'bad girl' often bar the girl's desire for sex as traditional gender role promotes that the women should be reluctant to sex. Sex is not only for physical pleasure but also for mental pleasure. Girls are not supposed to desire for sex because that will turn them into 'bad girls'. Bela at the field "felt no guilt, only fullness and fulfillment that made her limbs sweetly heavy." (Zaman 08).

"Even her husband had not seen her without some covering on her body. At night it had always been dark. She had only felt him, as he had her. Neither of them had seen the body of the other." (Zaman 04). That night for the first time, she saw a man naked. Was it a dream? Or had that actually happened? If it is her dream then it expresses her real desire for sexual pleasure. And if it is real then it clearly shows that it is her choice to go with the stranger. For the first time she felt that urge in her body. She did not feel shy. Instead "she opened unto him as the lotus opens unto the sun, and his heat and life were consumed in the soft moistness of her being. It was a consummation such she had never known." (Zaman 08).

In the dark field no one was there. No rules, customs, society to stop her. It was she with her own self and she chose to be with him, to give her wholly because "he was all the strength and vitality, she had known" (Zaman 08). In the story, the stranger calls himself as 'Prem', 'Suraj'. 'Prem' means love. 'Suraj' means Sun-the nature, the power of nature. Love is what where one can feel their true selves. So when one wants to hear her

own voice nature itself comes to fulfill it. Is not it the case with women? It is the responsibility of the women too to raise and forward their steps and grab their own place.

Another issue can be discussed here that Bela was ready to dance in the field at night naked because she knows:

All the men are at the *jatra*. And it will go on long after I return. Baba will see to it that no one leaves until the moon rises. There is plenty of time for me to dance and wear my clothes before that happens. Why should I be afraid? (Zaman 06)

So the fear of men is the only thing that could stop her from dancing.

IV. SEXISM AND RACISM IN "ALI'S BRIDE"

The next story is chosen from *The Dance and Other Stories* is "Ali's Bride" because of its complexity as it exposes the issue of racism and the importance of sisterhood. In the story, the writer enters into the very core of domesticity where a 'mentally retarded' man, Ali, is got married by his mother to a normal girl. After the marriage the responses of the other members of the family and Bhabi's, Ali's mother, reply to those are what matter here. Whether it is an 'injustice' or not that is determinable. In Bhabi's words:

Had I taken a young, beautiful girl, educated and of rich parents, you could have accused me of ruining a girl's life. But look at *Bou Ma*. She is not young, she is not beautiful. Her father is dead and she has six younger sisters.... Don't you think I have given her more than she would have ever got? Perhaps I have given her husband who is not perfect, but she will always have a roof over her head, always have enough money to live like a decent human being. Do you not think I have saved her from a life where she might have been reduced to selling the one thing she could call her own-her body? (Zaman 33)

A poor girl becomes much more miserable when she is ugly too. Though the concept of standard beauty is relative yet in Bangladeshi context girls with dark complexion are considered as ugly. So a poor ugly girl is not only under the domination of patriarchy but also under the rule of upper class people. Here we find the woman as the victim of both sexism and racism.

V. PRESENTATION OF WOMAN BY A WOMAN WRITER

Zaman has portrayed these simple rural and urban woman characters in a divergent way as they are the embodiment of resistance in the face of patriarchy and domination. In the post colonial terrain the colonized suffer from double vision. Then what's the condition of women in that perspective? Should it be termed as triple vision that they suffer as they are double colonized? Some prominent issues of feminism have also been awakened through the characterization of these short stories. Like through "Ali's Bride" the racist attitude towards women and the possibility of sisterhood is shown as Bhabi attempts to save that poor girl from being prostitute, through "The Dance" and "A Study in Black and White" the attempt and success of resistance on the face of patriarch society is described as Bela and Nargis were capable of going against the established gender roles.

VI. CONCLUSION

Identity is the expression of one's self which cannot be determined by the difference of gender. Identity also refers to the freedom of choice of being. The characters of Zaman are quite successful in putting forth their identity. Culture should enhance everyone. If a culture is gender biased then that is not a positive sight of a society. Clifford Geertz on culture says, "Culture is simply the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves." (As in Sardar and Loon 06). Zaman's stories are inspiring for not only the women in general but also for the women English fiction writers because it is important what and how an individual hears, sees, reads and interprets things as these are what opens one's vision of mind.

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