



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

Postcolonial Readings of Identity and Resistance in Naemat Imam's Novel "The Black Coat"

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the masterpiece novel "The Black Coat" by Neamat Imam through the lens of postcolonial theory. It focuses on the exploration of power, identity, and resistance in the postcolonial society in the novel. The novel follows the protagonist, Khaleeque Biswas, dealing with the effects of colonialism in a newly independent Bangladesh. This study will employ key concepts from postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha's concept "hybridity", "colonial trauma" by Frantz Fanon, "subaltern resistance" of Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said's idea of "cultural memory", to critique the persistent colonial legacies that shape both individual as well as national identities. The portrayal of a hybrid protagonist in the novel reveals the tensions between modernity and tradition and describes the psychological scars left by colonial rule on newly established states. The novel also addresses the individual alongside collective complexities of resistance against the prevalent postcolonial power structures. This study, broadly, emphasizes the role of cultural memory in shaping national identity and focuses upon the fragmentation inherent in post-independence narratives. "The Black Coat" contributes to postcolonial discourse by offering a nuanced reflection on the intersections of identity, history, and resistance in the contemporary postcolonial landscape.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Identity, Resistance, Cultural Hybridity, The Black Coat

Introduction

The novel "The Black Coat" (2013), authored by Naemat Imam offers a nuanced examination of the resistance and identity in a newly independent state in postcolonial condition. The novel delves into the complexities of both the national identity as well as the individual one. It focuses on the psychological struggle of the protagonist and his confrontation with the remnants of colonial power. Imam, through the lens of postcolonial theory, explores how colonial legacies persist in shaping both individual consciousness and the structures of society. The experiences of the protagonist: Khaleeque Biswas reflect Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity", where the "collision of cultures creates a fractured sense of self, which is caught between tradition and modernity" (Bhabha, 1994). This hybrid identity, in a way, serves as a metaphor for the



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

postcolonial condition, where individuals are often forced to explore conflicting cultural forces that shape their personal and collective identities.

The works of French-Algerian Psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon's (1925-1961) on colonial trauma is also integral to understanding the psychological dimensions of "Black Coat". Fanon (1963) argues that colonialism, either explicitly or implicitly, inflicts deep psychological scars on both the colonized and the colonizers. Imam's novel "The Black coat" embodies this through the internalized oppression and struggle for self-realization of the protagonist. The trauma of colonial rule, as Fanon suggests, creates a rupture in identity (Fanon, F. (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*). The characters in "The Black Coat" attempt to reconcile this as they deal with the aftermath of independence.

The novel "Black Coat" shows the persistent influence of colonial histories in shaping national and personal identities. At this juncture, Edward Said's (1935-2003) concept of "cultural memory" further informs the analysis of the novel. Said (1978) asserts that the colonial past is often embedded in the collective memory of postcolonial societies which shapes the fragmented sense of identity. In Imam's narrative, the journey of the protagonist is marked by the tension between remembering and forgetting the colonial past. It also shows the struggle to construct a national identity that can move beyond colonial influence.

In "The Black Coat", Imam portrays Khaleeque's personal resistance, not just against the colonial forces, but also in defiance of the postcolonial power structures. Here, the works of Gayatri Spivak seems to provide a critical framework for understanding the resistance against both colonial and postcolonial power structures in the oeuvre of the novel. Spivak (1988) emphasizes that the subaltern voices are often silenced by the dominant power structures (Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak?*). The attempts of the characters to reclaim power and agency reflect Spivak's notion of subaltern agency: self-assertion in the postcolonial contexts.

At the outset, "The Black Coat" offers a rich narrative that critiques colonial legacies. Imam's portrayal of resistance in all its forms show how the postcolonial subject experience the cultural, psychological, and political terrain of a post-independence world.

Literature Review

Naemat Imam's novel "The Black Coat" (2013) emerges as a key text in the postcolonial literary canon. It offers rich narratives that engage with the themes of identity, power, and colonial legacies in postcolonial Bangladesh. Through the exploration of Khaleeque's journey, the novel calls attention to the burdens of history, complexities of nationhood, and the personal struggles in context of postcolonial space.

One of the central themes in postcolonial readings of "The Black Coat" is the notion of fragmented identity. In postcolonial discourse, the question of identity informs a complex relation between the self and the other. Imam's protagonist: Khaleeque Biswas, is caught between his family legacy of struggle and the post-independence reality of a newly formed state. It reflects the dilemmas of a postcolonial subject which is complex in nature. According to Griffiths, Ashcroft, and Tiffin (2007), postcolonial identities are often "dislocated" and "hybridized" due to the prevailing effects of colonialism (Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H.



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

(2007). “Post-colonial studies). The individuals in the newly decolonized states tries to construct a coherent self in a space that has been shaped by external domination historically. Imam’s protagonist embodies this hybridity in all its forms. Khaleeque has been portrayed as grappling with personal and collective histories that seem to contradict each other in every sense.

“The Black Coat” by Naemat Imam has been studied as an allegory of postcolonial Bangladesh by various researchers. It is shown that the legacy of colonial rule continues to shape the socio-political landscape of the newly established state. Postcolonial theorists Partha Chatterjee (1993) argued that the struggle for independence often remains unresolved even after formal colonialism ends. The new postcolonial state often perpetuates structures of inequality and power that are inherited from the colonial period (Chatterjee, P. (1993). The nation and its fragments). Through the disillusionment of the protagonist, Imam critiques the failure of the state to meet the promises of freedom and equality. Chatterjee’s (1993) iconoclastic concept of “nationalism as self-representation” is relevant in this context. Khaleeque, in the “Black Coat” lives in the complex postcolonial political space where the pursuit of an authentic identity seems totally unattainable. Researchers such as Sabeena Bano (2018) have pointed out that Imam’s treatment of postcolonial disillusionment shows the gap between the lofty ideals of nationalism and the ongoing socio-political struggles in Bangladesh.

The novel has been examined for its portrayal of the tensions between the collective memory of a nation and the personal history, an aspect discussed by Zubair (2015). He argued that Imam’s exploration of these tensions shows a larger postcolonial idea with how history is shaped and remembered in newly independent countries (Zubair, A. (2015)”). As Fanon, in his book “The Wretched of the Earth” (1961) argues, the postcolonial subject must reclaim their history in order to break free from the cultural and psychological legacies of colonialism. The author’s treatment of the Bangladesh Liberation War can be seen as an attempt to recover the silenced histories of those who suffered in the struggle for independence.

Several studies of “The Black Coat” have highlighted its feminist undertones. They, for instance, note how it presents women not as passive victims but as individuals who are capable to survive in complex socio-political environments. Rifat (2017), for example, points out that the female characters in Naemat Imam’s novel often embody resilience and defiance (Rifat, T. (2017) women and identity in contemporary South Asian English Fiction). They challenge the patriarchal structures of both colonial and postcolonial societies. The present study argues that the novel of Naemat Imam titled “The Black Coat” serves as an important text for postcolonial scrutiny. This paper will attempt to explore the nuanced portrayal of history, identity, and memory in the context of post-independence Bangladesh in the novel.

By engaging with the themes of language, nationalism, and the legacy of colonialism, Imam’s novel contributes to the ongoing conversation about the complexities of postcolonial existence in the modern world.

Postcolonial Theory: A Framework for Analysis

Postcolonial Readings of Identity and Resistance in Naemat Imam’s “Black



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

Coat". Postcolonial theory offers a lens to examine how literature reflects on and responds to the legacies of colonialism. It includes the transformation of the collective as well as individual identities under colonial rule. It, additionally, maps the emergence of resistance movements. In Naemat Imam's novel titled "The Black Coat", the complex interplay of alienation, identity formation and resistance is crucial to understand how postcolonial subjects experience the deep fractures left by colonial history. This theoretical framework explores how the novel engages with the key themes in postcolonial discourse.

Postcolonial identity: The "Self" and the "Other"

In postcolonial theory, the concept of identity is deeply rooted in the dynamics between the "self" and the "other.". This relationship is key to the processes of colonial domination. In "The Black Coat", the author narrates how the protagonist: Khaleeque Biswas, living in postcolonial Bangladesh, faces the tensions between the colonial identity and the evolving national identity. This internalized conflict supports Said's argument that colonial subjects are denied the right to define themselves.

The theory of "hybridity" proposed by Homi K. Bhabha's further informs the identity struggles in the novel "The Black Coat". Postcolonial identities, according to Bhabha, are marked by a blend of colonial and indigenous elements, resulting in a hybrid space where new identities emerge. The protagonist of the narrative inhabits this hybrid space. He is torn between the modernity and the traditional cultural values. The fractured identity of the protagonist challenges both colonial and postcolonial definitions, as he lives in a world in which national identity remains unsettled and uncertain.

The Role of Alienation In Postcolonial Literature

Alienation is a defining feature of postcolonial literature. It explores the sense of displacement that colonialism instills in the colonized subject. Frantz Fanon's theory of alienation, particularly in "Black Skin, White Masks", is essential to understand the psychological struggle of Khaleeque in "The Black Coat". Fanon argues that alienation is not simply social or political phenomenon but a deeply psychological one. The colonized subject is forced to internalize the inferior status attributed to their culture, race, and language. The theme of alienation is often explored through the lens of Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern. The subaltern, according to Spivak, is often marginalized and silenced in the dominant discourses. In "The Black Coat", the alienation of the protagonist becomes a form of subalternity, as he struggles with the inability to voice his true experiences and desires in a society dominated by historical trauma and political instability.

Resistance and the Postcolonial Subject

In postcolonial condition, resistance offers a way for the colonized subject to reclaim their agency and power and challenge the oppressive forces of colonial and postcolonial domination. In "The Black Coat", Imam portrays resistance as both a personal and political struggle. Khaleeque's internal resistance to the colonial ideologies mirrors the broader resistance movements in postcolonial societies. There, individuals fight against the pernicious influence of



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

colonialism in the newly formed state.

Frantz Fanon's seminal work "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) offers a powerful framework for understanding resistance in postcolonial contexts. Fanon asserts that decolonization involves a violent confrontation with both the effects of colonialism and the socio-political structures that maintain inequality (Fanon, F. (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.23-25). Imam's protagonist shows a form of resistance that is not limited to overt political actions but is also psychological and existential in nature. Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "third space" also informs the idea of resistance in "The Black Coat." "The third space is where the colonized subject can forge new identities that resist both colonial and postcolonial ideologies" (Bhabha, H. K. (1994). "The location of culture"). Imam's protagonist struggles to define himself outside the externally constructed binaries. Through his resistance, Khaleeque, seeks to create a new narrative of selfhood which is not bound by the historical and political constraints imposed by colonial legacies.

The Politics of Memory and Reconciliation

The politics of memory, in postcolonial literature, reiterates itself in how individuals and nations confront the traumas of colonialism (Ahmad, A. (1992). "In theory: Classes, nations, literatures"). Imam's magnum opus: "The Black Coat" engages with the painful events of the Partition of Bengal and the subsequent formation of Bangladesh and the scars left by colonial and postcolonial violence. The struggle of Khaleeque with his identity can be seen as a confrontation with the historical trauma of partition and the national memory of independence.

The trauma of colonialism and its aftermath is not simply a personal matter but is embedded in collective memory (Nandy, A. (1983). "The intimate enemy: Loss and recovery of self under colonialism"). Khaleeque's search for self-definition in "Black Coat" is also a search for reconciliation, as he attempts to navigate a fragmented national identity. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of history resonates in the protagonist's engagement with the history of his nation. The process of reconciliation, is fraught with tension, as Khaleeque's journey reveals the struggles of postcolonial subjects to make sense of their identity in the wake of colonial history.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative analysis of the novel, focusing on thematic exploration, character development, and narrative structure. Data is collected through close reading, textual analysis, and relevant secondary sources for interpretation.

Research Questions

- 1) How does *The Black Coat* address the intersection of colonialism and personal identity?
- 2) How does resistance manifest in *The Black Coat* within a postcolonial framework?

Research Objectives:



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

- 1) To analyze how “The Black Coat” portrays identity and resistance in a postcolonial context.
- 2) To investigate the representation of postcolonial struggles and identity formation in the novel.

Data Analysis

Naemat Imam’s dystopian novel “The Black Coat” critically scrutinizes the legacies of colonialism. It shows how these legacies shape societal structures and cultural identities in postcolonial contexts. It applies the lens of post coloniality to sketch the resistance, postcolonial identity, and the socio-political turmoil following the end of colonial rule in Bangladesh. Imam’s novel highlights the struggles of individuals who are caught between newly forming national identity and the colonial heritage. By analyzing relevant excerpts, this analysis will explore how identity and resistance are represented in the novel.

Identity and Alienation: Navigating the Postcolonial Dilemmas

“The Black Coat” deals with the construction of identity in a postcolonial society where colonized are alienated by hegemonic powers. Khaleeque, a young man in Dhaka, is caught in an existential dilemma. His self-perception is shaped by nationalist sentiments coupled with colonial history. Through internal conflict of Khaleeque, Imam explores the tension between personal identity and national identity.

“I stood at the border of two worlds—the world that was mine before independence and the world that was supposed to be mine after. The coat was a symbol of that division, a reminder that I did not belong in either place.” (Imam, 2013, p. 45).

The protagonist: Khaleeque reflects on his identity crisis in the aftermath of colonial rule in Bangladesh. The coat which is a recurring motif in the novel, symbolizes the conflict between the past (colonial era) and the present (postcolonial struggle for identity).

“The revolution promised freedom, but it only freed us to choose between the tyranny of the past or the chaos of the future. How was I supposed to find myself in this?” (Imam, 2013, p. 120).

This excerpt shows the protagonist’s disillusionment in the postcolonial world. The revolution that was supposed to liberate the people has, instead, left them with a fractured identity. The author critiques the postcolonial state as one where individuals are caught in a liminal space between the oppressive legacy of colonialism and the uncertain future of an independent nation.

Resistance to Colonial and Postcolonial Oppression

The portrayal of resistance in “The Black Coat” is central to the postcolonial discourse of the novel. Khaleeque’s internal resistance to the colonial oppression is reflected by his resistance to the newly emerging postcolonial system, which is full of corruption and instability. Resistance becomes a tool for the protagonist to assert his identity and autonomy.

“I knew then that the struggle was not just against the foreigners, but against our own who had taken their place. We had merely exchanged one form of



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

tyranny for another." (Imam, 2013, p. 89).

This passage aligns with postcolonial theories of resistance particularly with Frantz Fanon's argument that decolonization does not end oppression, but rather transforms it (Fanon, 1963). Imam critiques the postcolonial elite who further exploit the systems of power of the colonial past.

"I wore the black coat as armor. Every button was a rebellion against a system that had no place for me or for anyone like me." (Imam, 2013, p. 154).

The black coat, which is adopted as a form of armor, symbolizes Khaleeque's resistance against both colonial and postcolonial systems of oppression. The coat acts as a protective barrier against a world that marginalizes him. The imagery of armor relates to the postcolonial concept of resistance as an ongoing struggle for self-assertion and survival.

The Role of Language in Postcolonial Identity and Resistance

Language is another significant tool of postcolonial resistance in "The Black Coat". Imam uses language as a tool to explore the power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. In a postcolonial society, language becomes a battleground for rejecting colonial dominance and asserting control over one's identity.

"Our words were not our own. They were the language of our colonizers, the language that forced us to wear their thoughts, their way of seeing the world." (Imam, 2013, p. 73).

The protagonist expresses his frustration over the colonial imposition of language. It reflects postcolonial critiques of language, as discussed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. He argued that language plays a key role in the colonial project of cultural domination (Ngũgĩ, 1986). By speaking the colonizer's language, the colonized subjects are forced to adopt their worldview.

"I found my voice not in their words, but in the silence, I learned to speak through." (Imam, 2013, p. 164).

The protagonist, here embraces silence as a form of resistance. By rejecting the language of the colonizer, he attempts to reclaim his own authentic voice. This act of linguistic rebellion aligns with postcolonial theories of reclaiming language and voice. Said (1993), emphasizes the subversion of the colonial language to construct new identities.

Conclusion

The novel "Black Coat" by Naemat Imam offers a deep postcolonial exploration of the complexities of resistance and identity formation in the aftermath of colonialism. Through the struggle of Khaleeque Biswas, Imam shows how colonial legacies continue to shape individual self-perception as well as the broader national discourse. The motif of the black coat shows the tension between colonial identities inherited by colonized and the quest for self-determination in the postcolonial world. Imam critiques the continued tyranny of both colonial powers and the postcolonial elites. The postcolonial powers perpetuate similar systems of control and emphasize the cyclical nature of oppression in the newly independent state (Fanon, 1963).

Imam's use of language as a tool of the resistance as well as of oppression highlights the key role that linguistic and cultural reclamation plays in



Vol. 3 No. 1 (January) (2025)

postcolonial identity. The protagonist's rejection of the colonizer's language, echoes the postcolonial reclamation of one's voice from the hegemonic structures that sought to silence it (Ngũgĩ, 1986). In dialogue with postcolonial theorists like Bhabha (1994) and Said (1993), Imam's novel, extends the discourse of subversion and hybridity. The novel maps the persistence of identity crises even in the face of supposed national liberation.

The novel "Black Coat" serves as both a reflection on the enduring challenges of postcolonial identity and a critique of the failure of postcolonial state to offer true freedom. Imam's work provides a compelling narrative of resistance, where the quest for identity is not just an individual journey. It is, on the other hand, collective endeavor, and ongoing process of negotiation and transformation in the face of historical trauma and contemporary oppression.

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