



PORTRAYAL OF A WOMAN IN *THE WEARY GENERATIONS*: AZRA

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Abstract

This study discusses the dominance of the female identity of Azra, the main female character of the award-winning Urdu novel Udaas Naslain (1963), over the male characters in the novel and the dominant female mission that the author assigns to the character. Azra, who marries Naim, a poor villager and a veteran of the First World War, comes to the forefront as a strong woman who is sensitive to her environment, empowers the society and supports her circle with positive approach in the period from the First World War to the partition of India. In 1947, the Indian subcontinent was partitioned and became home to two large countries, India and Pakistan. Following this division, the national identities of people in the Indian Subcontinent were categorized as Pakistani and Indian. This political separation and the prominence of national differences had negative effects on the societies of both countries, such as division and migration. Abdullah Hussein is one of the most important first generation writers of Pakistan who wrote about these negative effects. The first novel of the author discussed in this article was published in Pakistan in 1963 in Urdu under the title Udaas Naslain. The novel was deemed worthy of the Adamjee Award in 1964 by many literary critics and critics, the most prestigious literary award in Pakistan. The English version of the novel was reintroduced to readers in 1999 under the title The Weary Generations by the author himself, and then translated into many languages around the world. In 2009, it was translated into Turkish under the title Yorgun Nesiller. Written in a realistic style, this novel reflects the traumatic events that took place before and after the partition and the lives of the people who witnessed them.

Keywords

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YORGUN NESİLLER'DE BİR KADIN TASVİRİ: AZRA

Öz

Bu çalışmada Çağdaş Urdu edebiyatında Yorgun Nesiller (1963) romanının ana kadın karakteri Azra örneğinde toplumun siyasi ve sosyo-kültürel olaylarının yansımaları irdelenmiştir. Ana karakterin metinde diğer erkek karakterler üzerindeki baskınlığı bağlamında göç öncesi ve sonrası olaylar kronolojik bir biçimde anlatılır. Birinci Dünya Savaşı gazisi fakir bir köylü olan Naim ile evlenen Azra, çevresine duyarlı, topluma güç veren, pozitif yaklaşımıyla Hindistan'ın bağımsızlık mücadelesinde güçlü bir kadın olarak ön plana çıkmaktadır. 1947 yılında Hint Yarımadası bölünerek ayrılmış, Hindistan ve Pakistan adıyla kurulan iki büyük ülkeye ev sahipliği yapmaya başlamıştır. Bu ayrışma sonrasında Hindistan Alt-Kitası'nda kişilerin ulusal kimlikleri Pakistanlı ve Hindistanlı olarak sınıflandırılmıştır. Bu siyasi ayrışma ve ulus farklılığının ön plana çıkması her iki ülke toplumun üzerinde bölünme ve göç gibi olumsuz etkiler bırakmıştır. Abdullah Hüseyin de bu olumsuzlukları kaleme alan Pakistan'ın en önemli birinci kuşak yazarlarından biridir. Bu makalede ele alınan yazarın ilk romanı 1963 yılında Pakistan'da Urdu dilinde Udas Naslain, adıyla okuyucu ile buluşmuştur. Roman, pek çok edebiyatçı ve eleştirmen tarafından 1964 yılında Pakistan'ın en saygın edebiyat ödülü kabul edilen Adamji Ödülü'ne layık görülmüştür. Romanın İngilizcesi bizzat yazarının kaleminden 1999 yılında *The Weary Generations* adıyla okuyucu ile yeniden buluşturulmuş daha sonra da dünyada pek çok dile çevrilmiştir. 2009 yılında da Yorgun Nesiller adıyla Türkçeye çevirisi kazandırılmıştır. Gerçekçi üslupla kaleme alınan bu romanda bölünme öncesi ve sonrasında meydana gelen travmatik olaylar ve bunlara tanık olan insanların yaşamları yansıtılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

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The Weary Generations is one of the most important literary works of Urdu literature, offering an in-depth look at social problems, individual turmoil and issues of cultural identity. The novel deals with the inner conflicts of people in a particular period, the changes in society and its effects on individuals. This novel traces the significant changes in the social and cultural structure of Pakistan and emphasizes the effects of these changes on individuals. The novel deals with the transformation of a generation, the ways of coping with social pressures and the damage these pressures cause on individual identity. The characters' interactions with each other and their incompatibility with society deepen their loneliness. This loneliness is both a personal and social phenomenon.

The character of Azra in *The Weary Generations* remains very dominant and strong psychology. Her character depicts self-confidence throughout the novel. Her marriage with Naim also becomes possible with her bold way of talking. Azra, daughter of a powerful feudal lord Roshan Agha, is raised and in Roshan Lodge and got good education. "Azra, who is the daughter of Nawab Ghulam Mohyeddin Khan

(Roshan Agha), is shown as a strong woman who chooses Naeem as her husband by going against her father. *This upheaval shook the house built by Roshan Ali Khan of Rohtak. every means was employed to contain it, family and friends were all arrayed against the headstrong woman*" (Sadaf Afreen, Mishal Asif, Ifra Kainat, Wajid Riaz:1180). However, her husband Naim is from poor social and economic background. He hasn't got good education and his intellect is also poor. His father is a farmer and remains in prison for long time while Naim is raised and educated by his uncle. Naim is a young man from common social class whose information and viewpoint about life along with desires and thoughts also testify his middle class background. Azra's journey is a pivotal part of the narrative in *The Weary Generations*. Her struggles, her emotional conflicts, and her journey toward healing are integral to the themes of the novel. She explores the emotional and psychological trauma of partition, the disillusionment faced by many, and the slow, painful process of rebuilding one's life after such a catastrophic event. Azra's character shows the internal struggles of women who lived through the partition and its aftermath. Her strength, resilience, and unwavering loyalty to her family and community make her a central figure in Hussein's narrative. Her evolution from a young girl affected by war and partition to a woman dealing with its long-term consequences underscores the central theme of the novel: the weariness and sorrow of a generation that bore the heavy burdens of history.

Obtaining independence from British rule, the Indian subcontinent was divided in August, 1947 into two independent countries of Pakistan and India. In this way, Indian Sub-Continent achieves its independence along with division into two countries. Thus, humanity witnessed an important political event happened in 1947. Abdullah Hussein is generally known for his in-depth exploration of the dark and complex aspects of human nature. The India-Pakistan divide (1947) and the human tragedies in this process are particularly prevalent in his novels. The psychological depth and moral conflicts we see in characters he chooses are also felt in his works. Hussein's characters are generally individuals who are considered "extra-ordinary" by society, and his style of narration has a sense of internal conflict and reality. In this respect, Abdullah Hussein's style of narration shows a clear affinity to psychological and existential themes.

The connection between history and a novel like *The Weary Generations* is a rich and deep one, where historical events influence the characters, plot, and themes of the narrative. A historical novel often intertwines personal experiences with the broader historical context, offering readers an insight into how real-world events impact individuals and society. In *The Weary Generations*, the connection between history and the novel is essential in understanding the emotional and social impact of partition.

The historical event becomes a critical force that shapes the lives, experiences, and identities of the characters. Through the lens of personal stories, the novel conveys how history is not just about what happened in the past, but how it continues to affect individuals and communities, creating long-lasting consequences. In this way, the novel humanizes history, making it relatable and emotionally resonant for readers.

It is important to recall the famous accusation of Stendhal that "*a novel is a mirror carried along a high road*" (Ecevit, 2001: 23). The same is true for Abdullah Hussein. Here, the author pens down the novel by using his experiences and observations of various branches of art and literature according to the story of the novel. He can reflect his feelings, thoughts, experiences and desires through literature. "The novelist investigating the history emphasizes on the historical knowledge of leaders and mutual effort of large masses in determination of internal and external elements of historical facts and formation" (Kula, 2016: 159). Orhan Pamuk says, "Novels are like spending another life" (Pamuk, 2016: 9). In fact, the novel is a comprehensive type of literature in which every human-specific subject can be described, therefore, the authors have to deal with large extent of plots including sociological, psychological, social and many other disciplines. Twentieth century South Asia with its various forgotten or overlooked histories and memories offers for a rich spatio-temporal field for nostalgia to play out (Noor, 2020:371). The early Indian novel took on the task of reviving a glorious past to counter colonial attacks on Indian culture, or alternatively, to reshape Indian society in response to colonial criticism (Shandilya, 2017:35). This novel comprises of the important events from first world war till the partition of Subcontinent. Besides, the novel also shed light on different scenarios of Indian Subcontinent before partition. The author narrates the varying social and economic conditions of Indian Sub-continent.

In general, it is striking that unique features are attributed to women in the author's novels. For example, it cannot be predicted what Azra will do next, where she will go and what she will say. Abdullah Hussein perceives the public as a mass of middle class and below. Most of them are poor people. Among them are peddlers, porters, maids, petty civil servants, factory workers, grocers, dishwashers, painters, postmen, drivers, blacksmiths, electricians, furniture makers, policemen, etc. is found. For some reason, women do not come to mind in these occupational groups. Is the woman not included in the ring? (Javed Aqeeela 2005:242).

Every new trend in literature brings new concepts and understandings, which further strengthens literature. The development of the genre of the novel varies according to the ideas and developments of the literature. In Urdu literature, we can say that the influence of literary movements is felt faster and more intense than usual.

In some periods, literature may reflect the tendencies of thought of that period because there is a close relationship between literature and society. On the other side, it can be argued that the literary works produced by the ideologists are limited in terms of attracting readers.

The language used by the writer is different from the old, fancy and hard-to-understand style that is very approachable by literate people. The novels and literary work of the author emphasized on the problems associated with training and socialization along with provision of social awareness to the society particularly to women. This topic also serves as a model for the next generation authors.

Azra comes to the fore with her courage. It is seen in the novel that Azra speaks confidently at all times. For example, Azra's marriage to Naim takes place with Azra's courage. Azra is the daughter of a powerful landlord. She is well educated, she married with Naim despite the opposition of her family because Azra plays the role of strong women in the society with strong self and will in the novel. It is very true to say that Naim's interest in politics is actually based on Azra. In other words, Azra is actually the one who brought Naim to the forefront in the political events in the novel. Azra's participation in India's struggle for independence does not mean that she was alike millions of idealists or activists, who, like their contemporaries, dedicated and devoted their lives and wealth to the liberty of India. Muzaffar Iqbal says about Azra's wish to be active in Indian politics at that time as:

She is a representative of the bourgeois class which has only one goal: personal glory. Her participation in the Independence Movement is devoid of any commitment. She wants to get her pictures published in the newspapers. Her family likes to 'discuss politics' in the drawing room in a philosophical way. They are true examples of philistinism. Their ideals and goals come from the colonial masters (Iqbal, 1993: 34).

This is particularly clear with regard to development policies, which tend to institutionalize men's access to the state, while marginalizing women's access, which continues to be negotiated, to a greater or lesser extent, through their husbands (Moore 1991:184). It is felt like power of thousands of women is concentrated in the strong female characters in the novels of Abdullah Hussein. Therefore, in his novels women are not seen as simple and common entity. Azra is not like a common woman for Naim. Azra, has a dominant character that is characterized by her fascinated beauty, coy, coquettish, wiggling, educated, cultured, and even a bit cheeky role. Naim considered herself superior than him due to this dominant role of Azra in the novel. Thus Naim admire Azra's strong character while developing inside feelings of envy against her.

Naim's step brother Ali is also given separate attention and discussed in detail in the novel. It is important to note that the story of novel that is started and developed on the characters of Azra and Naim is ended up with the characters of Ali and Aysha.

Ali is fifteen years younger step brother of Naim. His character has two important qualities that are worth mentioning here. First, his love with Aysha and second, his envy with Naim. Ali spent most of his life except child hood years outside of Roshan Pur in a factory located in Shanti Nagar, a faraway town, remaining unaware of the troubles that are faced by Naim.

Ali's stay at Shanti Nagar that is far away from his village looks like a meaningless self-exile. There are many other young men who are also in same conditions as of Ali. The author has shed light on problems faced by thousands of villagers of the Indian Subcontinent of that era by role of Ali and troubles he faced. In this context, it is not a coincidence that the Ali and his beloved wife Aisha share the same fate. The author has pointed out that the problems faced by poor people in Indian Subcontinent are not only affecting those individuals but the dependents and social environment of those people are also being affected.

It is also observed that in background of story of Ali and Aysha, the novel has another important aspect. The author has revealed the destructive effects of industrialization in Indian Subcontinent in background while talking about the story of Ali and Aysha.

Although women have important and valuable role in Pakistan and Turkey but men never like inferior position against them in any aspect of life. If woman is beautiful and is superior over man in terms of education and culture, then man's domination over women in marriage is limited. Again, Azra's role in the novel looks like complementary to men's shortcomings.

Abdullah Hussein has criticized the society for downgrading the role of women in their education and brought up. Therefore, he has shown Azra and other women having more mental abilities than men in the novel. However, the women of the novel are left half way by the men as it happens in real life. Women characters in the novel other than Azra include Azra's aunt Shila, Naim's mother, Ali's mother and Banu.

In the first pages of novel the authors has used the technique of traditional story telling. The story narrative of novel starts from an imaginary village Roshan Pur within vicinity of state of Delhi soon after the incidents following War of Independence in 1857. Village is always present in the back ground of events mentioned in novel like, Roshan Ali's winning of award, Construction of Roshan House, Imprisonment of Naim's father, recruitment of soldiers for First World War, Feudal Law of 1914, Imprisonment of Naim, Ali's movement away from village, Partition, Migration,

Camps and start of new life. 'Village' in *Weary Generations* (Udas Naslain) has become an important motive for Abdullah Hussein. Village, that is used as significant place, plays important role in describing various events at the start and end of the novel. Naim lived in the village for some time after the release of his father from imprisonment. Naim did not feel any problem in adjustment to the village life despite his brought up in the city with his uncle. The author changed the role of Naim at once and he is seen as a common villager riding horse and working in the fields. However, Naim's life would not be continued for long as peaceful and happy. Against the recruitment of villagers in the army for war, the author expressed his response in these words:

Roshan Agha's word was a law. Inside of two hours, sixteen young men were enlisted. The visitors, including Roshan Agha, left the village with eighteen fresh soldiers. Women wept, old men's chests fell in several layers, young girls lost all sense of tomorrow (Hussein, 1999:85).

Naim participated in Royal Indian Army of British during First World War He was sent to different parts of world on war fronts like thousands of other Indians after completion of short training. The author has analyzed the first World War in different perspective by Naim where impacts of war on individuals is given more importance than states and armies. The author expressed negative impact of the war as follows:

Niaz Beg kept himself locked in the storeroom for a day and a night. When he emerged the next afternoon, the terror of the previous day had given way to a vacancy in his eyes that had spread out to cover his whole face, like the Vista of an empty, barren field.

Naim gone? He asked

The old woman, sitting by the hearth, looked back at him with vast, desert like eyes without answering. Niaz Beg cautiously approached the wall of the adjoining house and called out, 'Hussein gone?'

'Gone,' his neighbour replied from the other side of the wall.

'Who else?'

No reply came from across the wall. (Hussein, 1999:85)

The novel describes the killing of ordinary villagers who are forcibly recruited in the army as being the victims of brutal colonial rule. It is observed that Naim and thousands of other villagers were becoming mentally disturbed by fighting in war that was unrelated to them far away from their countries, villages, homes, homelands and women in despair exile on one hand and pain of conscience on killing the innocent people on other. Abdullah Hussein has adopted a unique style in depicting the forced recruitment of villagers. Mahinder Singh and Naim are continuing their talk:

Although supporting his weight on hands placed on either side of him on the stone, Mahinder Singh looked slumped, his back in the shape of a bow, his shoulders fallen, as if his body had taken on a different form.

'Tell me,' Mahinder Singh asked suddenly, 'why we here?'

'Because of the war,' Naim said. 'The enemy has attacked.'

'What, attacked our village?'

'Attacked the British sarkar and their friends.'

'What is it to us?'

'They are our masters.'

'Our master is Roshan Agha,' Mahinder Singh said simply.

'Yes, and the English Sarkar is Roshan Agha's masters.'

A brief hollow sound emerged from Mahinder Singh's mouth. 'How many masters do we have?' (Hussein, 1999:117).

These characters are enlightened in war and start to stand out due to their ability to navigate the complexities of societal expectations, familial pressures, and personal ambitions. They will often rebel against traditional norms and values after this. If they can return home alive after the war, they may reject forced marriages, societal roles, or family pressures, and choose their own path, which may be unconventional or seen as bold. The same is very similar for women, but women's visibility in society was much more limited at that time. Azra is also one of the rare heroic female characters who has gained visibility in society with her courage.

Conclusion

Azra is an important female character because she reflects the evolving role of women in Pakistani society and challenge traditional depictions of passive, subordinate female characters in literature. She inspires readers to question societal norms and push for change. Azra is a complex and multifaceted character in *The Weary Generations*. She embodies the resilience of a generation that survived partition and its aftermath. Her emotional strength, loyalty, and struggles reflect the broader social and political issues of the time, and through her, the novel portrays the profound human cost of historical events. On August 14, 1947, with the establishment of Pakistan, the national identities of intellectuals in Urdu literature changed as Pakistani and Indian. The influence of literary movements was also reshaped according to the political and national structure of the Sub-Continent. Abdullah Hussein, one of the most important first-generation writers of Pakistan after 1947. He appeared on the literary scene in 1963 with his first novel "*Udaas Naslain*" which by the dint of its theme, representation,

characterization and lucid style of writing. Proved to be his “magnum opus.” The original piece of art was written in Urdu language under the name “*Udaas Naslain*” which, the author himself translated in English entitled “*The Weary Generations*”. It is one of the most important novels in Urdu language. The fluency in style and depiction of fascinating characters by Abdullah Hussein have made this piece of work appreciable and significant in the eyes of critics. This novel comprises of the important events from first world war till the partition of Subcontinent. Besides, the novel also shed light on different scenarios of Indian Subcontinent before partition. The author narrates the varying social and economic conditions of Indian Sub-continent. Azra is a complex and multifaceted character in *The Weary Generations*. She embodies the resilience of a generation that survived partition and its aftermath. Her emotional strength, loyalty, and struggles reflect the broader social and political issues of the time, and through her, the novel portrays the profound human cost of historical events. She presents an important problematic of confronting the past and its effects on the present. Other main characters of the novel are a generation shaped by memories of the past, traumas and losses. The role of male and female characters in society and their relationships with each other is also an important theme in the novel. The partition is the central historical event that drives the plot and shapes the experiences of the characters. In the novel, the trauma, displacement, and violence of partition directly affect the protagonist and other characters. The historical event serves as a backdrop against which personal and collective stories unfold. The writer focuses on the personal and emotional aftermath of the partition, which involved the division of British India into two independent nations—India and Pakistan. This historical event caused mass migration, communal violence, loss of homes, and the disintegration of established social structures. He depicts through Azra and her family’s experience the devastating effects of the partition, which shapes their relationships and their outlook on life.

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