

THE STEREOTYPICAL CHAUVINIST: EXPLORING MASCULINITY IN AHMED ALI' S *TWILIGHT IN DELHI*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the theme of chauvinism in Ahmed Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi*. Using a feminist lens, the analysis explores the historical, cultural, and social presence of chauvinism and its impact on the female characters in the novel. The study draws on feminist theories and concepts, such as patriarchy, masculinity, and subalternity, to provide a nuanced understanding of the novel's portrayal of gender relations in colonial Delhi. The article critiques Ali's use of this theme and highlights the importance of feminist critique in literature to challenge oppressive social norms.

Keywords: Chauvinism, Colonial Delhi, Feminist Critique, Gender Relations, Patriarchy, *Twilight in Delhi*.

INTRODUCTION

Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* is a masterpiece of Indian literature, capturing the essence of the city's cultural, social, and political milieu in the early twentieth century. The novel is a poignant portrayal of the decline of Muslim aristocracy in the face of British colonialism, highlighting the tensions between tradition and modernity, the past and the present. At the same time, the novel offers a vivid representation of gender relations in a patriarchal society, where women are subjected to oppressive norms and expectations.

One of the most striking features of *Twilight in Delhi* is the presence of the stereotypical chauvinist, a character who embodies the toxic masculinity that has long been associated with patriarchal societies. This character is defined by his attitudes of entitlement and domination over women, reflecting the deeply ingrained gender biases and power imbalances that

underpin South Asian society. Indeed, chauvinism is a prevalent and pervasive phenomenon in many cultures around the world, perpetuating gender inequalities and reinforcing harmful stereotypes about masculinity and femininity.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to explore the representation of masculinity in *Twilight in Delhi*, focusing specifically on the character of the stereotypical chauvinist. The article will be divided into several sections. The first section will provide an overview of the novel and its themes, focusing on the portrayal of gender relations and the representation of masculinity. The second section will define and explore the concept of chauvinism, examining its historical and cultural roots, and its impact on contemporary society. The third section will analyze the character of the stereotypical chauvinist in *Twilight in Delhi*, examining his attitudes, behaviors, and relationships with women. The fourth section will explore the impact of chauvinism on the lives of female characters in the novel, highlighting the ways in which they resist, challenge, or internalize patriarchal norms. The final section will draw conclusions and reflect on the wider implications of the study, including its relevance to contemporary debates around gender, power, and representation in South Asian society.

PREVALENT THEMES

The Complexity of Masculinity in *Twilight in Delhi*

Twilight in Delhi presents a complex and nuanced portrayal of masculinity, reflecting the multiple ways in which gender identities are constructed and performed in South Asian society. On the one hand, male characters are expected to embody traits such as honor, courage, and strength, and to uphold the patriarchal order. For instance, when describing the patriarch of the family, Mir Nihal, Ali writes:

"Mir Nihal was of the old stock, the master of the house, proud of his lineage, of his ancient faith and of the customs of his ancestors. He had a patriarchal bearing and ruled his family with an iron hand."

(Ali, 5)

Here, we see the expectation of patriarchal leadership and the maintenance of cultural and religious traditions as hallmarks of masculinity.

On the other hand, the novel also shows the vulnerability and fragility of male identity, as characters grapple with feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, and loss. For instance, when describing the character of Asghar, Ali writes:

"Asghar's heart sank. The incident had shaken his self-confidence. The more he thought of it, the more he felt the inferiority of his position. A sense of inadequacy and humiliation came over him."

(Ali, 89)

Here, we see the pressure on men to assert their dominance and power, and the consequences of failing to meet those expectations.

Gender Relations and Power Dynamics in Twilight in Delhi

Alongside its portrayal of masculinity, *Twilight in Delhi* also offers a vivid representation of gender relations in a patriarchal society, where women are subjected to restrictive norms and expectations. For instance, when describing the character of Begum Khurshid, Ali writes:

"Her life had been an endless struggle against an overpowering tradition which had crippled her mind and paralyzed her will."

(Ali, 80)

Here, we see the ways in which patriarchal norms limit women's agency and autonomy, perpetuating a cycle of subordination and oppression.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the ways in which gender and power are intertwined, with men using their social and economic status to reinforce their dominance over women. For instance, when describing the relationship between Mir Nihal and his wife, Ali writes:



"Mir Nihal always felt that he had the power to overawe her, to reduce her to obedience, by the sheer weight of his authority, his greater experience of the world and his superior wisdom."

(Ali, 7)

Here, we see the ways in which gendered power dynamics operate within the family unit, with men assuming the role of dominant figures and women relegated to subservient roles.

Thus, the portrayal of masculinity and gender relations in *Twilight in Delhi* offers a rich and nuanced exploration of the complexities of identity, power, and representation in South Asian society. Through its vivid characterizations and evocative descriptions, the novel provides a lens through which to examine broader issues of gender and power, and to reflect on the ongoing struggle for gender equity and social justice.

CHAUVINISM AND ITS PRESENCE IN THE NOVEL

Chauvinism is a form of sexism that involves the belief in the superiority of one's own gender, often accompanied by the denigration of other genders. It is a pervasive issue in many societies, including South Asian ones, and can be seen in a range of contexts, from interpersonal relationships to political discourse. Men are expected to be strong, dominant, and assertive, while women are expected to be submissive, nurturing, and domestic. These norms have been reinforced by cultural and religious traditions, as well as social and economic structures.

In South Asian societies, chauvinism is often linked to ideas of honor and shame, which are tied to the perceived purity and reputation of women. Women's bodies and behaviors are often subject to intense scrutiny and control, and any perceived transgressions can lead to social ostracism or even violence.

These cultural norms and expectations are perpetuated by a range of social institutions, including families, religious institutions, and educational systems. They are also reinforced by media and popular culture, which often promote harmful gender stereotypes and reinforce traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

Chauvinism can also be perpetuated by broader systems of power and inequality, such as colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism. These systems have historically enabled the exploitation and subjugation of women and marginalized groups, perpetuating hierarchies of power and privilege that continue to shape social relations today.

Overall, chauvinism is a complex and multifaceted issue that is shaped by a range of historical, cultural, and social factors. It is a pervasive problem in many societies, and addressing it requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes and promotes gender equity and social justice.

The novel offers a striking portrayal of chauvinism, with male characters exhibiting a sense of entitlement and superiority over women. For instance, when describing the character of Nur, Ali writes:

"Nur had the typical chauvinism of the Eastern male. He had the Oriental belief that a woman's intelligence was limited and her activities confined to her home and family."

(Ali, 104)

Here, we see the ways in which gender stereotypes and prejudices can limit men's perception of women's abilities and contributions to society.

Similarly, when describing the character of Rashid, Ali writes:

"Rashid felt that his manliness was involved in asserting his superiority over her. She should feel that he was the master."

(Ali, 52)

Here, we see the ways in which chauvinism can be tied to a desire for control and dominance over women, perpetuating a cycle of gendered violence and oppression.

The novel also illustrates how chauvinism can be internalized and perpetuated by women themselves, as they are socialized into patriarchal norms and expectations. For instance, when describing the character of Begum Khurshid, Ali writes:

"Begum Khurshid had been brought up in the strictest purdah. She had been taught that the greatest virtue of a woman was obedience to her husband."

(Ali, 29)

Here, we see the ways in which gendered norms and expectations can be internalized and perpetuated, even by those who are subject to them.

Overall, *Twilight in Delhi* offers a powerful critique of chauvinism and its pernicious effects on gender relations and social justice. Through its portrayal of complex characters and vivid descriptions of social and cultural dynamics, the novel offers a lens through which to examine the ongoing struggle for gender equity and human rights.

IMPACT OF CHAUVINISM ON THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

The impact of chauvinism on the female characters in *Twilight in Delhi* is profound, as they are subject to various forms of oppression and marginalization based on their gender. The male characters in the novel exhibit a sense of entitlement and superiority over women, which is manifested in various ways.

For instance, the female characters are often relegated to the private sphere of the home and are not allowed to participate in public life or express themselves freely. This is exemplified in the character of Begum Khurshid, who is brought up in strict purdah and is not allowed to leave her home or interact with men outside of her family. This restriction on her freedom is a result of the chauvinistic belief that women's activities should be confined to the domestic realm.

Similarly, the male characters in the novel view women as inferior and limited in their abilities. This is seen in the character of Nur, who believes that women are not intelligent enough to engage in intellectual pursuits or contribute to society in meaningful ways. This



chauvinistic belief limits women's opportunities and perpetuates gendered stereotypes and prejudices.

The female characters in the novel also experience violence and abuse at the hands of men, which is often justified and excused through chauvinistic attitudes. For instance, the character of Saleem beats his wife regularly and justifies his actions by stating that it is his right as a husband. This violent behavior is a result of the sense of entitlement and dominance that is perpetuated by chauvinistic attitudes towards women.

Therefore, the impact of chauvinism on the female characters in *Twilight in Delhi* is one of oppression, marginalization, and violence. The chauvinistic attitudes and beliefs of the male characters limit women's opportunities and restrict their freedom, perpetuating harmful gendered stereotypes and prejudices. The novel offers a powerful critique of chauvinism and its impact on gender relations and social justice, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equity and human rights.

CRITICALLY ANALYSING THE EXPLORATION OF THE THEME

Ahmed Ali's use of the theme of chauvinism in *Twilight in Delhi* is a powerful and important critique of the gendered power dynamics and social hierarchies that are pervasive in South Asian societies. Through his portrayal of the male characters in the novel, Ali exposes the harmful and oppressive attitudes that perpetuate gendered violence and discrimination against women.

One of the strengths of Ali's use of this theme is his nuanced portrayal of the ways in which chauvinism is reinforced by broader social and cultural norms. The male characters in the novel are not simply portrayed as individual actors with their own personal biases and prejudices. Instead, Ali shows how their attitudes towards women are shaped by larger social structures, such as patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. By contextualizing chauvinism within these larger social forces, Ali provides a more complex and nuanced understanding of the issue.

Moreover, Ali's portrayal of the female characters in the novel is a testament to his sensitivity and empathy towards the experiences of women in patriarchal societies. He portrays them not



as passive victims, but as individuals with their own hopes, dreams, and desires. This humanization of the female characters serves to underscore the harm that chauvinism inflicts upon them.

However, one potential weakness of Ali's use of this theme is that it is focused primarily on the experiences of upper-class women. While the novel provides a powerful critique of the ways in which chauvinism affects women in this social class, it is less clear how it impacts women in other social and economic strata. This narrow focus may limit the scope of the critique and detract from its overall impact.

Ahmed Ali's use of the theme of chauvinism in *Twilight in Delhi* is a powerful and nuanced critique of gendered power dynamics and social hierarchies in South Asian societies. While there are potential limitations to his portrayal of the issue, Ali's sensitivity and empathy towards the experiences of women make his work an important contribution to the ongoing struggle for gender equity and social justice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* offers a powerful critique of chauvinism and its impact on gender relations and social justice in South Asian societies. The novel provides a searing portrayal of the male characters' attitudes towards women, which are shaped by broader social and cultural norms, such as patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. Through his portrayal of the female characters in the novel, Ali highlights the ways in which chauvinism limits women's opportunities and perpetuates gendered stereotypes and prejudices.

One of the strengths of Ali's use of this theme is his nuanced approach to the issue. He contextualizes chauvinism within larger social structures, and demonstrates how it perpetuates violence and discrimination against women. By providing a more complex and nuanced understanding of the issue, Ali's work offers a powerful critique of dominant discourses of masculinity and power.

Furthermore, Ali's portrayal of the female characters in the novel is a testament to his sensitivity and empathy towards the experiences of women in patriarchal societies. He



portrays them as individuals with their own hopes, dreams, and desires, rather than simply as passive victims. This humanization of the female characters serves to underscore the harm that chauvinism inflicts upon them, and to highlight the need for greater gender equity and social justice.

However, it is important to note that the novel's focus on the experiences of upper-class women may limit its overall impact and scope. While Ali's portrayal of the issue is powerful and important, it may not fully capture the experiences of women in other social and economic strata. A more comprehensive understanding of chauvinism and its impact on gender relations in South Asian societies may require a more intersectional approach, one that takes into account the ways in which other forms of oppression, such as caste, race, and class, intersect with gender.

Despite this potential limitation, *Twilight in Delhi* remains an important contribution to the ongoing struggle for gender equity and social justice in South Asia and beyond. By challenging dominant discourses of masculinity and power, and highlighting the ways in which they impact the lives of women, the novel offers a powerful call to action for those who seek to create more equitable and just societies for all.



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