



## Critical inquiry of “*Twilight in Delhi*” in the light of binary oppositions

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### Abstract

The present paper intends to discuss binary oppositions in the characters of the novel “*Twilight in Delhi*”. The research focuses on representation of Delhi’s culture v/s English culture, family constructor v/s destructor, idealist v/s realist, romantic v/s unromantic and bold v/s shy. Binary opposition is the basic concept of structuralism, a theory of sociology, anthropology and linguistics. Binary opposition states that all elements of human culture can only be understood in relation to one another and how they function within a larger system or the overall environment. It explores the relationships between different groups of people, for instance: upper-class and lower-class or disabled and non-disabled. In the same fashion the present study has analyzed the characters of the novel to present their actual status in the light of binary opposition. On the surface, these seem like mere identifying labels, but what makes them binary opposites is the notion that they cannot coexist. Binary opposition in the characters highlights the ways of living, behavior, choice, like and dislike. The study also gives post-colonial touch because the theme of the novel is set in colonial period. English ruled over India and deliberately imposed their culture. The downfall of Delhi’s culture and adoption of English one is also the part of this research.

**Keywords:** binary opposition, Delhi’s culture v/s English culture, family constructor v/s destructor, idealist v/s realist, romantic v/s unromantic, bold v/s shy

### 1. Introduction

Binary opposition is the key concept of structuralism. Binary opposition shows contradiction between two characters or objects. Elements of binary oppositions have made novel interesting and played central role in making its plot construction well chained and connected. Binary oppositions can broadly be seen between characters of Nihal and Asghar, Bilqeece and Zohra. Mir Nihal is Asghar’s father follows Delhi’s old culture. He wants his family to live like Mughal’s but his son adopts English culture. Nihal wears Muslin-kurta, whereas Asghar contrary to him wears English boots. Asghar’s way of living is totally different from his father. Nihal is family maker; he constructs his family whereas Asghar destructs the old customs and traditions of his forefathers. Bilqeece is simple and shy whereas her younger sister is bold and modern. Asghar is romantic in nature whereas his wife Bilqeece is unromantic. Binary opposition does not only deal with characters but it also represents clear difference between the cultures of colonizer (British) and the colonized (Indians).

In “*Twilight in Delhi*” Ahmed Ali has used descriptive method to show the characters in the development of novel’s plot. Every character is close to the actual condition of Delhi. Ali’s realistic mode of expression in describing the relation of plot and character is remarkable. The opening section of the novel and its first chapter seems as a prologue to city’s actual condition and its inhabitants. When we go through the novel, we find that the writer has used the art of characterization as a nice tool to realize his end. He has a plot and for the

completion of the plot the characters come at the stage at a particular time and then leave the stage. Still there is one central character that is most of the time there in one or the other manner. This is the main male character of Mir Nihal who plays the pivotal role in the book novel. All the events have a direct or indirect bearing at his character: all the characters are related to his character in one or the other way. So the spot light remains most of the time on Mir Nihal.

Mir Nihal’s character has been portrayed with utmost precision and accuracy. He is a man who has witnessed the last episode of the surrender of Delhi on 14th September, 1857, the fateful day, with his own eyes. He is a patriot in the core of his heart. He feels pain and torture at Hindustan’s slavery but he believes in direct use of sword to liberate his country whereas people are resorting to some other “useless” ways and means, like rallies, marches, strike and non-cooperative movement. Mir Nihal’s character is a representative of the older generation who has seen the country going into the clutches of slavery with his own eyes. So he hates the rulers. On the other end is Asghar, his younger son, who likes the English fashion and ways. Although, he also represents Indian Muslim culture in his own way but he belongs to the younger generation and, as such, differs with Mir Nihal. Both of them are having their own singing and dancing girls: Mir Nihal has Babban Jan and Mir Asghar has Mushtari Bai but the former “keeps” Babban Jan till her death whereas the latter leaves Mushtari Bai in the lurch and starts loving Bilqeece so intensively that he leaves no stone unturned for her achievement as a wife. It is another story that

he, even then, does not keep himself limited and goes out on his romantic adventures or errands to find out new women for him. The author has taken one family and shown what its members experience in their day to day life. All these are simple, insignificant things, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, festivals and fairs, marriage, birth, death, naive love affairs, quarrels and arguments. The arrangement and selection of these incidents in the novel have been given a fundamental and universal significance. Ahmad Ali is depicting the story of the dying Indian Muslim society in his novel, so he picks and chooses from the society only such characters that can be helpful to him in the context. These characters may be as overwhelming as Mir Nihal and Asghar and these may be as summarized as Kabiruddin, the elder brother of Asghar, and Habibuddin. These small characters perform their duty behind the scenes. Even Ahmad Wazir, the family barber of Mir Nihal, has to perform his duty at two places in the novel. Dilchain and Ghafoor do the duties of servants in zanana and mardana of Mir Nihal's house. Once Dilchain wears men's clothes and dances in a lewd manner on the occasion of the marriage of Asghar. But all this is done to represent the dying Indian Muslim culture.

### 1.1 Literature Review

In "*Twilight in Delhi*" memory is seen both as source of personal identity and as a burden preventing to attain happiness. Each character is involved in a struggle to remember but more importantly in a struggle to forget certain aspects of their past. Mir Nihal the protagonist of the novel wants to seek refuge in the past. He wants to live in past not in present. The other characters, like Begum Nihal, Begum Jamal and the elder sons of Mir Nihal, all of them found in struggling condition. The grandeur and wonderful Muslim's past, in which they were rulers not wipe out from Mir Nihal and his family's mind, like Asghar seemed rebellious but in the end of the novel he was caught in the trap of cruel and remorseless fate. The city "Delhi" had faced the rise and fall of many Kings and princes like a poet said.

Delhi which was once the Jewel of the world,  
Where dwelt only the loved ones of Fate,  
Which has now been ruined by the hand of time,  
I, m a resident of that storm-tossed place . . . .

But now the present scenario has impolitely changed people who were rulers now they are under the domination of colonial forces. So Mir Nihal is not able to forget the grandeur of past. His management and behavior in his family totally reflect the king like way as Moghals did in past. All the characters of the novel especially Mir Nihal are shown in a struggling position, the whole family and the surrounding area's people never able to come out from the memory of their glorious past.

With the arrival of the British colonial forces in the sub-continent everything had changed. People who were habitual in living under the kings were not able to face a change. The protagonist of the Novel Mir Nihal never able to compensate with the new traditions. Britishers gave change to their style of living and the government structure but he wants to live

according to the past. "New ways and ideas had come into being a hybrid culture .... The whole culture of India was a mixture of two cultures the new generation want to adopt the English culture like in the beginning of the Novel Asgher's first appearance was in wearing English shirts and Mir Nihal scolded on it His sudden anger on him showed his hatred and non-accomodateable attitude towards and modernity." He was a backward person like in the mid-end of the novel the episode when he tries to give punishment to the children he said to Dilchain that you go and took my sword and he took his sword and children seemed terrified not in real sense, this shows that he did not left the past, but he did not want to think about it. Sex is the most important theme of the novel. Mir, Asgher and all the women characters in the novel are sexually suppressed figures. Mir Nihal, a tall handsome and energetic man, desperately wants a woman who knows well the art of sex and the art of capturing man. So, Babban Jan, a young girl gave him all these pleasures and when she died his whole world deranged. He felt a kind of flux in his life, which cannot be full-filled. He had also sexual relations with Dilchain. Begum Nihal's quarrel with her husband shows that Mir Nihal's sexual appetite was not satiated from Begum Nihal. It was a rampant trend in the Delhi that male society went to prostitutes and when they became habitual of them then they were not accommodating with their wives because they were not adroit in the art of capturing man through sensual ways. So, most of the men had not time for their wives. Asgher also had a mistress Mushtari Bai. She was a young, beautiful, fascinating and charming girl. Asgher often went to her Kotha and became habitual of her. But when he saw Bilqeece he bewitched by her extreme beauty. He desperately wants to marry her and after huge amount reluctance from Mir Nihal he succeeds to marry with her. But he feels that she lacks sexual understanding. So Bilqeece cannot able to feel the gulf between them. So she is unable to understand why her husband left her in the house for weeks. But begum shahbaz feeling the actual problem interferes but Asgher is not able to manage the whole issue. The whole Mir Nihal, s family represent the Muslim class of India and throughout India they have the same life style. Men often satiate their sexual appetites to go to the prostitutes and women remained ignorant because they had no knowledge about what is going on there.

One of the major themes is the passing away of Muslims civilization in India. *Twilight in Delhi* basically showed the decay of the Muslim civilization. Muslims ruled on India from many centuries but with the arrival of Britishers, the whole civilization had to face a huge set back. Mir Nihal, who lived in the illusions of splendid past, not able to accommodate with the present condition. His appearance and attitude represent the Muslims community of that time. Which is not able to live according to the changed conditions because they felt that this is the most humiliating condition for the Muslims. Like Niven says: "Despite the rhapsodic treatment of Asgher's love Bilqeece (Ali's own wife is called Bilqeece), the autumnal mood at the novel's close the grief-stricken regrets for the Mughal past and the frequent coherence in his prose style, Ali writes less from a romantic than a classic stand point. He recognizes the immutability of the basic

elements in human life individual remains the same in every age." Yet classicism in so far as it refers to recognition of the permanence of the change brought about by the passing of time is perhaps the intention of the novel's plot.

## 2. Research Question

How has Ahmed Ali presented the "Binary Oppositions" in the characters of his novel: *Twilight in Delhi*?

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Descriptive qualitative research

The present research in its nature is qualitative and employs textual-narrative analysis of the novel "*Twilight in Delhi*" from the vantage of point Literary Discourse. The collected data for the present paper are descriptive and narrative. Therefore, the qualitative tools like definition, explanation, interpretation are employed to analyze the data and draw generalization and conclusion.

According to Kothari the writer of "*Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*" discusses the major purposes of the descriptive research and description of the state of affairs as present. The research can report what has happened or what is happening. (Kothari, 2008, p.3). Moreover, in the eyes of Calmorin *et al* (2007) Descriptive Research is to find new truth. According to his deep study in the field of research methodology truth may have different forms such as increased quality of knowledge, a new generalization or a new „law“, an increased insight into factors which are operating the discovery of new causal relationship, a more accurate formulation of the problem to be solved and many others" (p. 70)

## 4. Data analysis / Discussion

### 4.1 Representer of Delhi's Culture v/s English Culture

Nihal's character and his hobbies are microcosmic of Delhi's culture. Mir Nihal is basically descendant and ardent follower of Mughals. Even after downfall of Mughal emperorship Nihal is still in that era and wants to apply Mughals ways of living in modern world. "He was an aristocrat in his habit, no doubt a typical feudal gentleman, as his hobbies testified. Besides pigeon flying he was fond of collectin old china and had devoted some time to alchemy and medicine." (Ali, 38) Ahmed Ali in his art of characterization and describing character appearance has his no equal. In Nihal's characters we smell fragrance of Delhi, feel charm and vivacity of its culture and see walking and talking its people. Ahmed Ali describes Nihal's physique "he is tall and well-built and is wearing a shirt of muslin coat reaching down to the knees and embroidered round cap is put at a rakish angle on his bobbed head. His white and well combed bearded is parted in the middle and give his noble face a majestic look (Page, 9). Contrary to Nihal, Asghar is represented adopting English culture. Though Asghar is son of Mir Nihal but he did not get effects of his family. English culture and modernism is circulating in his blood. Ahmed Ali describes his appearance "he is a tall handsome young man with his hair well-oiled and his red Turkish cap cocked as a smart angle on his head. The upper buttons of his sherwani are open and show the collar of the English shirt, that he is learning under it. Mir Nihal stop and

turns to Asghar and says you are again wearing those dirty English boots don't like them. (Ali, 13)

### 4.2 Family Constructor V/S Destructor

Binary oppositions between in Nihal and Asghar's characters can also be seen as family constructor and destructor respectively. Mir Nihal always proves himself as caretaker of his family. Mir Nihal is apparently strict but actually he is soft-hearted man. His love with Mughal emperors and hatred with frangis was on peak but even then he did not take much serious action against Asghar. Asghar's choice of girl out of the cast shocked his family and deeply hurt Mir Nihal. But as soft-hearted man he at last was agreed on insists of his wife and daughter "and he when went home he gave his consent to Asghar's marriage with Bilqeece. (Page 119) Bilqeece was not selected by Nihal but as a family maker he accepted her after marriage and appreciated on her good cooking. In early days of Biquece's marriage Nihal did not talk to her. He neither liked nor regarded her as a domestic woman, but with the passage of time Bilqeece proved herself by following Indian culture, loving her husband, cooking delicious dishes and caring of cleanliness of the home. These actions built soft corner in Nihal's heart and his appreciation of her acts proved it. "In the evening she prepared a special dish for dinner. When Mir Nihal ate it he asked his wife "who has cooked this today?" Asghar dulhan why is it badly cooked? No, not bad, 'he said not bad at all and he smiled and looked pleased and stroked his bread. In an evening he brought fine green satin and gave it to Bilqeece. Though Begam Waheed was soon widowed after her marriage but as a family maker he did not bring her from her husband's family forever. He let her lived in her husband's family even after his death. Begam Jamal was widow of Nihal's brother but he did not send her back to her father's home. He gave her status of his sister and never ever let her felt that she was deprived of anything for a good life. Nihal said "was it for that I had kept her in the house and treated her like my own sister "(page, 260) Mir. Nihal always tried to construct the family. On the other hand Asghar was just concerned with himself. Whether the world remained or destroyed; it was immaterial to him. He always thought of himself. In the perspective of family builder Asghar was opposite to Nihal. After the marriage of Bilqeece many ladies saw her wearing English shoes and said "hai hai sister have you seen those dirty shoes Asghar wife is wearing? She looks like a good-as-dead frangan. (Page, 188) This sarcastic remark hurt Bilqeece. She was ashamed and her tears rushed to her cheeks. They insulted her father, and this harsh criticism cut her to the quick. (P, 188) Aaghar could not bear her wife's insult and decided to take separate home. He said "you should forget all about it. I shall take a separate house and shall live alone as soon as I have got a job". (P, 188) Asghar's this decision proves him family breaker. Because such a big decision does not match the causes of decision on which he has made his mind to separate from his family. Just on insult to take decision of separation from parents and to settle his family unless he gets good job proves that before marriage he has made his mind that he will settle his own family as soon as he gets a good job. Before his marriage, Asghar was involved in illegal relations with Mushtari Bai and other prostitutes.

Asghar's love for Bilqeece was physical; spirituality has no importance at his glance. Bilqeece was a domestic girl. The home in which she grew up was her world and the family was her society. But Asghar expected something else from her. He wanted her to entertain him as he was satisfied by Mushtari Bai and other courtesans. Bilqeece was a simple girl, unaware of the art and ways of entertainment what prostitutes knew well. Professional women had considerable expertise to sexually entertain their customers. Bilqeece knew nothing about that art. Bilqeece failed to fulfill required desires of her husband which caused cracks in their relation. "Asghar loved her more than anything in the world and smothered her with kisses. But she was not romantic at all. This damped Asghar's feelings. He thought his Mushtari Bai and other sweethearts. He remembered the warmth of their loving ways. (Page, 180) For Bilqeece, Asghar's love was not genuine; he just loved with her body. Asghar was cynic: who knew the price of everything and value of nothing. Descent of Asghar's love began from the point of his experience of the absence of the desired quality in Bilqeece's performance. After that he started neglecting her which caused the disease that took her life. Asghar, after death of his first wife, wanted to get second married with his sister-in-law. She was junior to Bilqeece who used to come to help her sister out during her illness. In this period Asghar had planned to get married with Zohra. That's why Asghar talked to her parents separately. Asghar first talked to his mother "you know amma Asghar said with a sigh, it does not matter so much about me. But the poor child her life is in a mess. There is no one to give her food or change her clothes. It is sometime; because of her that I think it would be better for me to marriage again. (Page, 257) Asghar has spoken to Mir Nihal and apart from raising any objection he had seemed please with his decision and said "yes my son, you should marriage again, you are still young. When Begam Nihal went to Begam Shahbaz and gave her the proposal for Zohra's hands. Begam putt off the matter by saying that she must consult Ashfaq. Begam Shahbaz indirectly refused Begam Nihal because she had known that what type of man Asghar was. Begam Shahbaz and Ashfaq had seen real face of him. They knew that the disease from which Bilqeece died was actually created by Asghar. In their eyes Asghar was killer of Bilqeece. When Begam Shahbaz's opinion was taken for Asghar's marriage with Zohra she replied "heaven and earth might become one but I will not marriage to Zohra to him. (Page, 258)

#### 4.3 Idealist V/S Realist

Ali depicted character of Mir Nihal as an idealist who lives in modern world but whose state of mind is still in Mughal period. Mughal emperorship is no more in his time. Modern culture brought by English has replaced culture of Delhi. He scolds his son when he sees him adopting faringis' (English) culture. Once Asghar wearing English boots enters home, on which Nihal stops him and says "you are again wearing those dirty English boots I don't like them" (page, 13) Asghar wants to marry out of family but Nihal openly opposes it and says to his wife when she talks to him about Asghar's marriage "have you gone made along with him? How can my son marry Mirza Shahbaz's daughter? You want to bring a low-born into the

family. There are such things as family honor and name. I won't have the marriage. (Page, 68) Contrary to Nihal, Asghar is realist, the man of his day. He sees the things as they are. He has opened his eyes in the world in which he finds English culture strengthening its grasp. There was no space between him and modern civilization. Message and effect of English people have reached throughout the country. British ways of living and thinking have rooted in the lives of new generation. Asghar knows well that his selection of girl for marriage out of the family would never be appreciable but even then he dared, and got married. After marriage his decision to shift in another home and decorate home with English furniture proves him realist. "So Asghar took a house adjoining that of Begam Shahbaz, and began to live there with his wife. He fitted it up beautifully and bought more English Furniture." (P, 192)

#### 4.4 Romantic V/S Unromantic

Asghar was romantic in the love of Bilqeece; he was liberal in nature usually passed most of his time outside in gathering. He had relation with courtesans especially with Mushtari Bai. He adopted English culture that had changed his way of living and bent of mind. Asghar just wanted to enjoy his life. He was not concerned with any one's life. He hated noise pollution and loved peace and contentment. Once when he went to bed, he heard noise of quarrelling from neighbor. He says "O God gives me death I am tired of this life" (P. 28). This line proves his romantic nature. In love he is dying every moment. He is in search of peace that he even can't find at home and even at night. Now he is in love of Bilqeece, always thinks of her, nowhere he finds consolation. Neighbors' late night loud talking doesn't let him sleep. Asghar shared his feelings with his friend Bari that his life has become a burden; the time is ripe for death. On Asking of Bari about the girl he was in love Asghar replied "She is beautiful Bari, very beautiful. She is graceful as a cypress. Her hair is Blacker than the night of separation, and her face is brighter than the hour of love. Her eyes are like narcissi, big and beautiful. There is their whites and poison in their blacks. Her eyebrows are like two arched bows ready to wound the heart of men with the arrows of their lashes. Her lips are redder than the blood of lovers, and her teeth look like pearls studded in a row.... I tell you she is beautiful." (Page, 32). Asghar's romanticism was seen on its peak when he declared that he would finish himself if she did not become his life partner. "If I am unable to marry Bilqeece I will commit suicide." (P, 50) Contrary to Asghar, Bilqeece was a simple, unromantic, domestic girl, always remained at home. She was unaware of the world outside home. She had been brought up by an aunt, her father's sister, an old and religious person. Till the age of fourteen she had lived in the atmosphere of an Indian home where women are not supposed to have desires and passion. She had just gone through religious books that's why did not know about love and romance. She had to strictly follow religion "even in her childhood she had not been allowed to keep her head uncovered." She was not allowed to wear perfume and attractive clothes. "She lives under the threat of going away to strangers when she grows up, who may turn out to be rich or poor or nice or bad" (P, 181). She was mentally captured by



the family and fate that she had to get married the person whose name is written in her destiny. She was made “yes woman” who had no desire. In atmosphere of suffocation she was passing her day and night.” In this atmosphere the idea of love does not take root in the heart. She was shy. She ran away when she saw Asghar. “Asghar thought of the day when he had seen Bilqeece a few weeks ago. It was evening and he had gone to see sister in law the staircase was just in front of him perhaps Bilqeece did not know that he was sitting there for she came down into the courtyard. It was not until she stood face to face with him and their eyes met she came of his presence. Seeing her he struck over powered by her beauty (page 33). She was educated and provided knowledge that love is worst kind of thing. Asghar just looking at her apparent beauty became mad to get married her. He shows that he would have been smashed into thousand pieces if he would not marry (Page, 50) His discussion was full of praise of Bilqeece, his insists on Begam Waheed to get married with her showed that his love with Bilqeece is beyond measure. If he got her married he would never leave her for even a single minute. He would never let tears roll down her eyes. Pang and sorrows would not have mettle to knock at her door. But nothing happened like that. Asghar’s feelings and sentences proved to be totally different from his action. After marriage he comes to know that Bilqeece is unromantic and unaware of the art what professional women know well. So far beauty is concerned Bilqeece was peerless but unfortunately she was not up to the level of Asghar’s thought. She failed to physically satisfy him up to the mark “at such moment Asghar loved her more than anything in the world and smothered her kisses. But she was not romantic at all. This damped Asghar’s feelings. He thought of his Mushtari Bai and other sweethearts. He remembers the warmth of their passion and their loving ways. (Page 180) Her unromantic nature disappointed Asghar and demolished the castle that he had built in his mind. Her unawareness of ways to entertain him like Mushrari Bai and his other sweetheart appeared cracks in their relation. Asghar left her dying at home. Lived most of the time outside and came at home late night. Bilqeece suffered from TB but even then she was not properly cared and treated. She became weak, thinner and pale. Bilqeece said to him “I do not know what I have done to displease you that you do not speak to me now” (page, 204). But he always gave argument of his involvement in different works and tried to be free from his responsibilities. He says “I have been up to my neck in the work and have been worried” (page, 204).” I work and slave and slave from morning till night. (Page, 205) Asghar’s negligence and callousness caused her illness and slowly and gradually her disease took her life.

#### 4.5 Bold V/S Shy

Bilqeece was beautiful, domestic and shy. She was follower of Indian culture. She was not bold at all and far away from modern culture. She was not bold like other sort of dancing girls like Mushtari Bai etc. “Asghar thought of the day when he had seen Bilqeece a few weeks ago. It was evening and he had gone to see sister in law the staircase was just in front of him perhaps Bilqeece did not know that he was sitting there. She came down into the courtyard. It was not until she stood

face to face with him and their eyes met she came of his presence. Seeing her he struck over powered by her beauty. (Page, 33) She was shy that’s why she could not satisfy Asghar’s sexual desires. (Page, 180) On the other hand Zohra was a bold girl. She was sixteen year old and younger than Bilqeece. Most prominently she knows strength of her. Zohra had grown into a beautiful girl of sixteen and her charm of beauty seemed to be more attractive than that of Bilqeece. She was conscious of her sex and there was an air of abandon about her. She looked at Asgher with admiring eyes and pitied him in his sorrow and loneliness. Asghar has also become aware of her presence and when she came his heart was filled with a secret joy” (Page 243) In spite of her mother’s refusal of proposal she met Asghar and informs him about her intensity of love. This showed that she possessed bold nature, in other words we can say she had come of her age therefore she could not hold her passion of love as, after her conversation with Begam Jamal and the talk with Begam Nihal, Begam Shshbaz told Zohra not to go before Asghar, and observe purda with him. “But the two houses were connected, and Zohra went to see Asghar secretly. She had listened to Begam Jamal’s conversation with her mother and reported to Asghar”. (page 258)

#### 5. Conclusion

This research paper has tried its level best to present a complete picture of binary oppositions found in characters of the novel. *Twilight in Delhi* is a historical novel focuses on Mir Nihal and his family as changes occur in their personal lives and in Indian culture. In representation of Delhi’s culture v/s English culture, differences of both cultures have been analyzed. Characters of the novel have been depicted changing their own culture and adopting English one. In representation of family constructor v/s family destructor, Nihal is depicted as constructor of the family whereas Asghar is depicted destructor. In representation of idealist v/s realist, Nihal is depicted idealist whereas Asghar is depicted realist. In representation of romantic v/s unromantic, Asghar is depicted romantic whereas Bilqeece is depicted unromantic. In representation of old v/s shy, Biqueece is depicted shy whereas Zohra is depicted bold.

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