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Politics of Representation in Raza Rabbani's Invisible People

Dr Shahzeb Khan
Assistant Professor
Department of English Language and Literature
University of the Punjab, Lahore.
Correspondence: Shahzeb.english@pu.edu.pk

Waqas Yousaf
Visiting Lecturer
University of the Punjab

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the problematics of representation of the downtrodden in the *Invisible People* by Raza Rabbani. This research presents a case study of how when the rich and the powerful decide to represent the poor and the powerless, the endeavour may result not only in an artistic failure but may also amount to an ethical failure. Such a study is warranted as Rabbani belongs to the political elite of Pakistan but chooses to represent the oppressed in his collection of stories. This cross-class representative endeavor cannot be taken normatively and has to be investigated and evaluated in the context of relevant discourses. The theories of Re-Orientalism (Lau, Introducing Re-Orientalism, 2014) and Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* have been utilized to build a theoretical framework to undertake this study. Nivedita Majumdar's work "The Question of Exoticism in Indian Anglophone Literature" has also been utilized for deeper scrutiny of the text. The importance of the politics of representation cannot be overestimated, as the so-called representative institutions continue to operate on a non-representative basis.

Keywords: *Re-Orientalism, Exoticism, Staged Marginality, Pakistani Anglophone literature*

Introduction

This study ponders over the issue of cross-class representation, especially the representation of the downtrodden by an affluent and empowered writer. It utilizes Lisa Lau's theory of Re-Orientalism and Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* from which the term 'staged marginality' will be employed to analyze Rabbani's narratives. Insights from Nivedita Majumdar's essay ''When the East is a Career: The Question of Exoticism in Indian Anglophone Literature'' will also be utilized to assess the possibility of exoticization in the case mentioned above. Discourse analysis has been employed as the method of analysis.

The issue of representation remains far from settled. While scholars have offered insightful critiques into its uses and abuses, authors continue to represent regardless of the ethical constraints its use imposes on them. At the surface level, it seems laudatory that someone decides to represent the voiceless, the downtrodden, and the poor who does not belong to the same group, however, academic scrutiny reveals the enormous disadvantages which accompany such an endeavour. Critiques of this non-representative representation have appeared from within the postmodern, and

postcolonial theoretical positions. Peter Canning, for instance, critiques it from the postmodern position and says that if representation can tell the truth then it can also lie, distort, and misrepresent as well (E.winguit, 2001, p. 339). It is in the postcolonial realm, however, that the abuses of misrepresentation have been laid bare. While writers steeped in their native tradition and indigeneity have written back to the empire revealing the intricate depths of their cultures in the English language, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi Wo Thingwo among others, in the academic realm the ills of misrepresentation were brought to the fore in full view by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). Later critics, especially Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes (2014) have exposed the perpetration of misrepresentation of the local realities by the locals themselves. Before them, however, in 2008 Nivedita Majumdar, in a remarkable study went into the depths of the issue of misrepresentation and explained how the discontent with Anglophone writers representing the local realities is not simply a lack of narrating some genuine essence of 'Indianness', in the case of Indian Anglophone writing, but it stems from, among other things, artistic concern itself as the writing reveals a lack of understanding of the subject matter being described. Majumdar has thus presented a method to assess whether a representation is exotic or authentic. For her, a writing being exotic amounts to an artistic demerit while being authentic means artistic finesse.

The author, Raza Rabbani, whose work of fiction the *Invisible People* is under scrutiny here, has claimed to portray the lower class and their sufferings in his stories. Since the writer belongs to the empowered class—has been the seventh Chairman of Pakistan's Senate, has remained in the power corridors for decades, and owns assets worth 22.2 million (Ali, 2017), it is interesting to see if his representation of the poor communities withstands the test postcolonial critics have devised to assess exoticism or authenticity. His representation of the wretched of the earth becomes problematic since the very act of writing presumes that he has a tangible understanding of their conditions and has thus taken the decision of writing about them.

One premise of this study is the postcolonial critique which has exposed that the representation of the colonized by the colonizer was politically motivated and hence inaccurate since they were not only more interested in governing them for economic dividends which the colonized regions had to offer but also did not have the requisite understanding of the local realities. Similarly, it might be assumed, that in a country with an estimated 55 million people living below the poverty line, can an affluent politician with assets in tens of millions, be an authentic voice for those who lack the bare necessities of life? This is the primary question that this research seeks to address.

Scholars in the field have been consistently trying to grapple with the complicated nature of representation. In the context of South Asia, Nivedita Majumdar discusses in detail the issue of exotic/authentic representation in the works of a few Anglophone writers. She concludes her article with the pronouncement that most works of postcolonial writers are full of exoticism and their representation of the downtrodden is exoticized (Majumdar, 2008). She discusses Chaudhuri's article ''The East as a Career'' and Chandra's article ''The cult of Authenticity.'' In her analysis, both of these writers defend the idea that Anglophone literature does not exoticize. She evaluates the notion of exoticism through the ideas of class and language. In her article, she has pointed out the importance of the western market as

an important factor in terms of the choice of themes and subjects for authors who get published in the west. She is of the view that the Anglophone literature often lacks signs of engagement with the Indian realities, and offers neat, mythological images of the nation for which there is a demand in the west. She gives the view that exoticism does not evolve out of the difference between the writer and audience rather it takes birth from a dissonance between the writer and his subject matter. According to her at a fundamental level, exoticism is a symptom of a lack of empathy between the artist and the subject matter. According to Majumdar, Anglophone writers defending themselves, instead point out their affinity with their readers and their being comfortable with their representations. For her, this slippage from 'subject' to 'audience' is an important issue in Anglophone writings. This difference coerces the writers to produce texts according to the audience who are normally the people like themselves, urban and upper class at home and abroad. Additionally, at the very basic level, such an understanding between a writer and a reader tends to establish the narrative as reliable (Hansen, Reconsidering the unreliable narrator, 2007, p. 227). However, Majumdar if of the opinion that a representation's unreliability stems from a dissonance between the author and his subject matter and not between him and his readers (Majumdar, 2008, p. 4) and for Hansen, a narrative's unreliability may also stem from intranarrative, internarrative, intratextual, and intertextual reasons (Hansen, Reconsidering the unreliable narrator, 2007, p. 241).

The charge of exoticism presents another aspect that the writers who claim to present the poor, actually have a lack of engagement with the political and economic life of the group. It can further be dug as a difference in cultural life i.e. food, clothes, music, and religious rites. Thus, the difference in lifestyle also enhances the fact of exoticism. Majumdar quotes Huggan who says that mystification or leveling out of the historical experience, imagined access to culture, and reification of people into exotic objects help postcolonial books and their authors to acquire an almost ''talismanic status'' (Huggan, 2003, p. 19). While Majumdar and Huggan critique the possibility of diasporic writers and postcolonial writers capitalizing upon their affiliation with the home cultures and market them in the west, Lisa Lau discusses inaccurate and unreliable narratives that emerge from the local elite. Re-Orientalism, her theory which frames the afore-mentioned issue, is a representation of the locals by those writers whose perspective continues to be Oriental in the postcolonial context. The author in this case is thus an insider and an outsider at the same time. A major problem she has highlighted is that there is an abundance of 'generalisations' and 'totalisations' in such narratives (Lau, 2009, p. 584).

Invisible People has received significant praise for being a book which brings to light those 'invisible' people who are the victim of the society's cruelty. Rosie Dastgir, author of 'A Small Fortune', while giving her views on short stories of Mian Raza Rabbani says that these evocative stories possess the depthless quality of fables, though written with realist intent, exploring the neglected underside of modern Pakistan life at its harsh. The collection is praised for telling the stories of people who are invisible from the eyes of an elite class of the society but take full benefit from the hard work of a common man (Yasin, 2017). *Washington Post*'s foreign correspondent Pamela Constable considers it a "powerful later-life cri de coeur that aims to stir consciences in clubs and drawing rooms across the country."

The author himself is quoted in the review regarding what prompted him to write these stories:

> What prompted me was a feeling of helplessness, a feeling of despair, a feeling of frustration, because even after achieving this office, this chair, I am still a slave of the system. Apart from cosmetic changes, I can do nothing meaningful to change it substantially or to change the plight of the people who are invisible. In our society, it is still hands off. (Constable, 2017)

According to Saeed Ur Rehman, who is himself an academic and a scholar who has worked in the area of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, "The stories are unabashedly moral and describe the condition of the poor and the downtrodden and the schism caused by the unequal distribution of wealth". In a short review, he has highlighted that the collection is written by the author of "the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, an amendment that empowered the provinces as much as possible". Rehman calls the collection a "bare-knuckle punch" with a "raw effect" and praises Rabbani for trying to improve the world by legislating and for writing stories on things he could not improve (Rehman, 2017).

In an interview, Rabbani stated his honest confession: "When I became chairman Senate I realised that even after becoming the chairman there was nothing tangible I could do to make a difference in the society" (Bilal, 2017). While Rabbani has had a comfortable childhood as his father was an air force officer and a young aide to Pakistan's founding father (Constable, 2017), he "had to work [his] way from an ordinary political worker to" what he accomplished, "… That included running [to catch] buses, pasting fliers [on the walls] and laying *darees* (cotton rugs) for [public meetings] (Bilal, 2017). He also spent two years in jail, where he claimed to have met "a wide cross-section of Pakistanis" and the jail afforded him "the unique privilege of interacting with the real Pakistan" (Bilal, 2017).

This desire to *connect* with the *real Pakistan*, the majority, in terms of providing them with an escape from their entrapment in the socio-economic rigmarole, the desire to *do something* which could not be done while chairing the highest legislative assembly of the country, the desire to try the redressal storytelling may offer can be understood as his craving for an endorsement of his *authenticity* as a genuine representative of the people of Pakistan, a task he thinks he failed at as a politician. He thus entered the domain of fiction, considering that by penning a few stories he might redress himself, and would enter into genuine solidarity with the wretched and the poor of Pakistan. Just as his confession that he has failed to *do anything* as a senior legislator, his stories also reveal a confession that is invisible to a casual reader but would become visible on closer scrutiny. This last confession, this study aims to tease out from the *Invisible People*. To put it plainly, the article tests Rabbani's narratives in the light of what postcolonial critics would call the politics of representation.

One important and evaluative prism through which a representation is sieved through, postcolonially, is that of reliable narration. The discourse allows a critic to judge if the narrator is to be trusted in the depiction of the story or whether some sort of doubt is also being betrayed by the narrator. Traditionally, when "a reader and a narrator share a worldview, a moral standard, values, or beliefs, the narrator will be reliable to the reader. If not he/she will be unreliable" (Hansen, 2007, pp. 227-8). This explains the stance of most of the reviewers of Rabbani's stories in the

popular press. None has raised this question regarding the authenticity of his narratorial voice. This, however, in narratology, is considered an outmoded method of understanding narratological reliability. A similar concern is resonated in the following statement which critiques the hollowness which is usually attendant when the political elite of a postcolonial society upholds "claim for marginality" (Morton, 2010, p. 162). This is basically at the heart of postcolonial hegemony where the elite become the new Orientals (Lau, Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals, 2009) and remain adamant that they would continue to represent. They fail to see the essential principles of representation violated in the so-called democratic dispensations where a feudal lord with large landholdings gets votes from his serfs and gets a seat in the parliament to 'represent' them without ever knowing empathically. A Similar, non-representative representation, which is structural in nature, and continues from the colonial period, becomes the causal core that disenfranchises the ordinary people of the country. The moneyed class represents and legislates for the precariat without having a deep understanding or empathy with their state of affairs. The same audacity, which the elite derive from the system they drive, allows them to pick up a pen and decide to give a 'voice to the voiceless' or make 'visible' those who have been rendered invisible by the same system of which they are themselves the beneficiaries.

At a more technical level, we find ample examples of this unethical exoticization. In the story, ''Brewing'', the writer has depicted an aristocratic household and a poverty-stricken house. Both descriptions offer details about the luxurious life of a wealthy family as well as the precarity of a poor household. A careful reader can observe that the writer invests his creative or perhaps imitative energies in describing details of the aristocratic household. He feels at ease and seems comfortable describing the inner description of a big house whereas describing the impoverished house becomes a challenge for him. The following passages from the story describe the destitute house:

''She steps into a small veranda which serves as her father's bedroom. His cot is along a wall, through which a window opens on the only room of the house. Under a makeshift basin used for washing utensils and clothes, which is also where her father and younger brother take their baths'' (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017, p. 64).

Later in the story, the writer depicts the affluent house as:

''A few weeks on, Jaan is standing in a room of an imperial house, the likes of which he has until now only seen from the outside. Two walls of the room are entire of glass, from the ceiling to the floor, which is paved in marble. From one window a Japanese garden seems to roll into the room, like the kind people swim in on TV. On a grand chair like a throne sits his new mistress, legs crossed, wearing slacks that show her ankles and set off her manicured feet in leather sandals. She has on a boy's top and a string of pearls, and her fingers are covered in rings. Her heavy perfume fills every room of the house'' (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017, pp. 66-67).

One can see the difference between the above descriptions. The writer invests 52 words to portray the cottage of the impoverished house, while he utilizes 122 words to describe only a single room of the opulent. The sketch of the house of the deprived is also very shallow as it lacks any artistic details. Whereas the description of a single room utilizes more than twice the details as compared to a complete house.

One might say that the linguistic resourcefulness of the writer seems limited when it comes to the description of a poor household and thus gives up after writing a few sentences, whereas describing a rich, urban, empowered household would be his home turf and thus greater facility in its depiction. Similar, sketchy illustrations, depictions of the broad contours of poverty can be seen strewn all over the stories which ostentatiously claim to paint the poor of Pakistan. The fact that all hopes of a humane and empathic interaction between the rich and the poor are dashed also becomes an acknowledgment of the narrative that the author's own attempt to do the same through literary representation also hint at the futility of such an attempt. In ''Broken dreams of a Boy, Anno, a rich boy who interacts from within his SUV, with Habib, a poor child of 10 years of age, who begs for alimony in the guise of cleaning car windows, decides to visit the home of the poor boy who dies because a car hit outside his school, is unable to enter his home as he hears a woman wailing inside the house. He was about to "lift the dirty curtain which served as a door"…but lost his nerve to lift the curtain and enter the house and returned home (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017, p. 62). The civil space that is required for humane interactions does not exist in society or within the narratives. In the absence of socio-economic egalitarianism, when a member of the upper echelons of society desires to *do* or *write something* for the powerless, the efforts are destined to either result in an alibi of representation, as is confessed by Rabbani in the declaration of his failure to do anything meaningful for the deprived classes; or is manifested in an empathic failure, as is the case with the narratives presented in the *Invisible People*.

However, when it comes to the portrayal of state institutions, like a court of law or a prison, Rabbani offers insights into the institutional rigmarole appropriately described in "Imprisoned Law", and "A Dead Man Walks". As someone who has practiced law for a long period of time and as someone who had himself been imprisoned for two years, he narrates these stories by dwelling on details and goes close to describing the intricacies of these spaces. But here too, we find traces of "intranarrational unreliability" (Hansen, 2007, p. 241) as the poor security guard compares the beach, where his master's Chota sab goes to the party, with "Normandy on "D" day" (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017, p. 77). Quite obviously this is where the author forgot to consider the limits of his character's exposure.

The writers either living abroad or in the country, usually touch on specific themes. This phenomenon is appreciated as well as criticized by the critics. First of all, it is important to discuss the concept of exoticism and staged marginality. According to Huggan:

"Exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent quality to be found in certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery'' (Huggan, 2003, p. 13).

Stereotypical and formulaic depiction of Pakistani society has also been identified by critics as a problem with Pakistani literature in English. One component of this formula is that the women would also have a very difficult time surviving within a narrative, or would almost always find their hopes thwarted. As Snehal Shingavi highlights it in the following words:

…themes are straightforward: women have a tough time in Pakistan. Uzma Aslam Khan's Trespassing, Nadeem Aslam's and Kamila Shamsie's books, and Hanif's Our Lady of Alice Bhatti are about this question (Shingavi, 2013)

Rabbani's stories also fall within the same category. His narratives are at best a sentimental attempt to make the invisible people, visible without delving deep into the causes of the coop-like structure in which the people are trapped. It is the same formation that results in the buoyancy of the entrenched classes and while the author has himself remained within the power corridors, all he attempts in the stories is a hasty portrayal of those who bear the brunt of the system. Huggan's idea of 'staged marginality' is also visible in these stories as marginality itself becomes a commodity for the consumption of empowered classes (Huggan, 2003, p. 87). One might argue that the choice of the subject of his stories is flawed which has come out due to a lack of critical engagement with one's paradigm, the paradigm which favors the already-empowered to narrate the powerless. Nivedita Majumdar has explained this issue in detail and has stated those who claim to represent but are removed from the subject matter they portray defend themselves by highlighting the inevitability of their distance from those they describe, however she says that it is actually the "*dissonance between the writer and his subject matter*[1]" (Majumdar, 2008, p. 4) which results in an inaccurate portrayal.

All of Rabbani's stories have bleak endings and are devoid of any active resilience on part of the economically challenged. Hope which has always been audacious in the wake of despair has been stifled by the authorial intervention. The old mother "tak[es] her case to … the court of Allah" at the end of "Imprisoned Law" (Invisible People, p. 29), the worker in the cotton factory with a disease at an advanced stage is coerced out of the hospital with uncertain future as he is no longer fit to work in a cotton factory in "The Flower of Dust" (Invisible People, p. 36), the unnamed woman in "Innocence Lost" "feels as though she has died…, for the second time in her life" (Invisible People, p. 42), Irfan is hit by a black limousine at they end of "They are in Darkness" (Invisible People, p. 54), Anno's request to lodge a report against his uncle whose car crushed Habib to death is met with his father's snub, "Don't be silly" (Invisible People, p. 63) and so on. This denial of agency to the economically precarious is another instance of unreliable narration at the intertextual level. The author's misplaced choice as far as his selection of subject matter is concerned and his lack of diagnosis of what actually ails Pakistan deludes him into thinking that the characters he purports to represent are not smart enough to think of ways to avoid the oppression of the system through human solidarity, relationships, caring for one another, subsisting on a meager income, and by doing everyday acts of kindness and heroism. The author thus fails to create a plausible account of human portrayal because of his inability to go deep not only into the human psyche, but also into the inner recesses of the system of oppression he has been so intimately familiar with. He seems to have hardly scratched the surface of this unfair system and thus resorts to depicting a not-very-convincing bleak picture and fails to appreciate the finer nuances of courage and fortitude which are inevitably embedded in the very fabric of every human society.

[1] Majumdar's emphasis

The narrative also appears to be unreliable in its portrayal of women. The women characters seem to have traces of boldness, a desire to bring about some change in their state of affairs but the author fails them again and again throughout the stories. The authorial intervention seems to be anti-woman. The narratives can be read as an almost perfect testimony of patriarchal writing where the natural agency of women characters is artificially stifled—perhaps due to the creative fatigue which would have been necessary had the author were to track the path the audacity of his characters would have taken the narrative to. The story "Innocence Lost" can be read as a story of a feudal rebuke since in it we find a young girl who leaves her house only to land herself in front of a pimp who asks her to sell her body to have the world at her fingertips. Her dreams to have dignity and self-respect, to have an education and honest life are *stereotypically* bound to be thwarted (Invisible People, p. 41). Qazalbash et al have found a similar pitfall in film representation of Pakistani women's plight: Saba, around whom Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy's film resolves, is shown to surrender at the end of a socio-legal fight (Qazalbash, Islam, Ullah, & Khaleel, 2019, p. 167). Sakina, in "The Flower of Dust", expresses her courage by telling her husband that she would sustain the household by cleaning houses but the narrative ignores her voice though the story ends with his hand on Sakina's shoulder and they walk on (Invisible People, p. 36). In almost every story women have been depicted as easy prey to their society. Almost every story has a woman character who tries to fight the cruelty of society but at the end of the day, she fails. As in the story ''Pigeons'', there are two sisters who have to work at a brothel where they are mistreated by the persons who come there. There is a tussle in their minds to leave this pathetic life and be respectable members of society and both of them try it but they miserably meet failure in their attempts. One of the sisters runs away from the brothel and starts living a normal life by working in an office but soon she is dismissed from the job as she denies to fulfill her boss' desire. Her sister also tries to break away from the brothel but when she imagines her sister's consequences she become hopeless and the writer says:

''She tried desperately to be happy for her sister, but she knew in her heart that society never accepts a woman from Mandi. The marriage would perhaps be kept hidden or would be denied by relatives. Even so, she also longed to break out from her captivity and seek a new life, a life of dignity and respect. But then she stopped, thinking, ''I, too, will never be accepted outside of here.'' (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017, p. 64)

After weighing in on possibilities, she reaches the conclusion that neither of the ways is right for her and like other charterers of *Invisible People* she embraces death which provides her a bitter escape from her sufferings. So the story ends with her suicide.

Critiquing stereotypical mode of Pakistani representation, Shingavi mentions Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* which "has every single stereotype about honor killing" (Shingavi, 2013). Rabbani also mentions it in the story ''A dead man walks''. A character is in jail for killing her sister in the name of honor as she tried to run away with her boyfriend. The character who has killed his sister lives a life of luxury as he belongs to the upper class. Jail is like a home to him and does not even feel regret for his action and proudly talks about it.

''I killed my sister for the honor of my family. My sister was engaged to our cousin but I saw her talking to another man at the village well. We are five brothers and we decided that she has dishonored the family and must be killed. I volunteered because the other four are married and have families.'' (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017, p. 83)

The authors who formulaically present the theme of honour killing might protest. The point is to offer some deep insight instead of just throwing it in as an ingredient necessary for the consumption of the local elite—the implied reader in the case of Pakistani Anglophone writing. Adrian A Hussain, a Pakistani critic says it candidly: "there is a plethora of stereotypes in Pakistani fiction in English. It's unreal, contrived and looks like a set-up, keeping the market consideration in mind" (Aslam, 2016). There is no effort to go into the causes of what might have been the reasons for the continuance of such cruel practices despite the existence of a state and its coercive and ideological apparatuses. Something very sinister happens with this kind of depiction. As the murderer says: "The whole jail respects me, I will be free in next few weeks, I will not be convicted because of Qisas. My father will pardon me, this was an act of honor killing.'' (Rabbani, Invisible People, 2017). A reader is bound to deduce from this that the 'whole society' is cruel and heartless and that there is something inherently evil found in 'Pakistanis.' This opinion is rooted in colonial racism which 'found' something innately flawed in the colonized, an error that automatically invited the colonizers, the westerners, the English speakers to come and govern them. Needless to add, such a view is quite an extremist view of a society where people are the products of its institutions. Perhaps, a person like Rabbani should have wondered, what sort of changes are required at the institutional level, at the level of the Ideological State Apparatuses, and social institutions which would alter the behavioral patterns of the masses. But since paradigmatic questions are hardly questioned, he too, found it safe to rearticulate stereotypes in the garb of stories. The narratives thus lack any reflective depth regarding these important matters and hence do not seem to have any insightful value.

Snehal Shingavi in his interview with Bilal Mushtaq also discusses the idea that the dominant theme in most of the Pakistani writings is that women have a tough time here and there is no survival for them in this male-dominated society (Shingavi, 2013). Similar Re-Orientalist strategies have been identified in two other Pakistani Anglophone writers by Rohma Saleem as she "reaffirms the fact that Pakistani English fiction writers, consciously or otherwise, resort to techniques of re-Orientalism in projecting the indigenous cultures (Saleem, 2017). Saleem also quotes Rahman who has identified similar stereotypical portrayal which fails to acknowledge the presence of empowered, political women in Pakistan.

''The portrayal of women as marginalized figures denied of any voice, or independent life is a reaffirmation of western beliefs. They, the westerns have a pretty fixed image of third world female living an extremely miserable life. The Oriental woman needs to be "freed" from the constraints of male domination, and none other than the liberated West can play this role of "knight in shining armor" (Rahman, 2016).

Rabbani writes within the same Re-Oriental paradigm. There is no story in the collection which presents a woman as empowered and happy. As is the case with any society, in Pakistan too, both good and evil exist along with myriad shades of

grey in between. A writer is expected to show a range of these shades, but this can happen only when the author has a greater degree of empathy and artistic finesse and has an uncanny ability to see into the nooks and crannies of hope and despair, resilience and failures. The lack of ability to see closely enough is thus an artistic as well as an ethical failure as far as representation is concerned.

In representing Pakistan, Rabbani's *Invisible People* falls in the familiar pitfall which has been highlighted, among others, by Snehal Shingavi:

"Pakistan is lawless, conservative, reactionary, orthodox Muslim, anti-woman, and run by military dictatorships and crazy politicians. It is because people writing in English in the 90s and 2000s grew up under the Zia administration. They are concerned about the state, military, and mullahs and their critique are right. We should be critical of Zia and Musharraf, but they tend to over-emphasize those things and under-emphasize the actual nature of Pakistan, which is also heavily invested in fighting against them.

What Rabbani also misses is that the down-side of Pakistan which he has represented in his narratives ignores the efforts and human will which is "heavily invested in fighting against" these ills (Shingavi, 2013). In one of his interviews, Rabbani responded to the interviewer about his reason for resorting to attempt this cross-cultural representational project, by stating his reasons for resorting to fiction writing as "his frustration with not being able to deliver, coupled with [his] anger at [his] class of society" (Bilal, 2017). Perhaps, without realizing, he too, as an author, could not de-class his perspective as his narratives overpower his characters, disempower most, reinforce stereotypes, ignore examples of everyday struggle and resilience, deny potency to women, and superimpose his pessimism onto his depiction of Pakistan. It is a denial of agency to the poor. It essentializes on their economic condition and thus fails to acknowledge other dimensions of their human resilience. When we try to investigate the causes of such a broad-brush portrayal, we inevitably identify the author's own socio-economic status which becomes a hindrance in knowing what he is set out to represent. A great artist, however, can transcend this barrier with her superior perception, empathy, and respect for the subject matter, which in the case of *Invisible People* seems lacking.

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