

Metamorphosis through Pain: The Quest for Belonging in the Works of Anna Molka Ahmed

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Abstract

This research examines the intricacies associated with displacement, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging in the works of Anna Molka Ahmed - a Pakistani artist. Her artwork depicts a painful cultural oscillation between her native land (London) and the adopted one (Lahore). By incorporating semiotic analysis with Bhabha's postcolonial theory of third space, this research establishes art as a third realm for an artist. Moreover, Ahmed's dual journey of place and self, depicts a metamorphosis that is mirrored throughout her artwork through an adept use of color and symbolism. This research investigates how Ahmed, as an immigrant, challenges patriarchal norms and colonial compartmentalisation through meticulously created artwork that mirrors her assertive voice. Her artwork is analysed as a transient space for a hybrid where she transmutes her alienation into a creative sense of belonging, thereby emphasising that for Ahmed, art was both self-defining and transformative. This assimilation of a diasporic hybrid's identity within the foreign land is portrayed as a progressive and intentionally constructed discourse, and is revealed through an in-depth analysis of Ahmed's paintings. Thus, this research presents a radical reinterpretation of Ahmed's hybrid identity and search for a home through her art rather than through her territorial affiliation.

Key Words: Third Space, Displacement and Belonging, Subaltern, Cultural Identity, Semiotic Analysis

Introduction

Recognised as a Pakistani female artist, Anna Molka Ahmed, experienced an emotional pendulum swing between her own cultural roots and the newly embraced foreign land, consequently leading to a sense of displacement. This research explores the quintessential and intricate issue of 'belonging' in the work of Anna Molka Ahmed through the analyses of her paintings. Her artwork projects a personal account of her existence and is particularly context-related. By focusing on Ahmed's art, this study highlights that it is significant to examine the work of a female immigrant, who despite making a conscious decision of settling down in a foreign land, struggles to find her place in that setting. This quest for belonging to the land once

assumed (by her) as a riveting Orient, is explored through the semiotic analyses of her paintings. The transition from a naïve girl to a resilient woman came with a myriad of emotional and physical sacrifices. This painful metamorphosis experienced by Ahmed is projected through her paintings.

Furthermore, culture and identity can be relatively defined through a hybrid's perspective in relation to the experience of immigration. Thereof, Bhabha's concept of third space is also discussed throughout the analyses as an intangible entity that can exist in the form of art and literature for an immigrant's existence. Anna Molka Ahmed, as an immigrant and a hybrid, intricately constructs her identity in the landscape of a foreign land through her paintings. Hence, this interdisciplinary research establishes art (in any form) as the third space for an immigrant artist through which he/she assimilates in a society.

Literature Review

Metamorphosis in simple terms means 'change'; it can be radical, or it may require a gradual process. Human beings face the risk of radical transformation in times of calamity. Consequently, through this process of land disposition, culture and identity crisis, the artist creates and assimilates him/herself with a self-created space. The space created by Anna Molka Ahmed is in the form of art. This space creates a sense of belonging for her existence regardless of the land he/she is living in; hence, it can be interpreted as the third space or as an '*ambivalent*' state as Bhabha describes (Bhabha 55).

The content of Anna Molka Ahmed's paintings is highly context-relevant which is one of the reasons for exploring the dynamics of a female narrative. Cultural identity of a hybrid according to Bhabha, always emerges in "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation," therefore, "inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (Bhabha 37). The confrontation of the survival of identity and finding a space of her own in a foreign land is explored through semiotic analyses of her paintings. Art and literature share an analogous relation where one medium expresses the other. Human beings are driven by a constant desire to comprehend meaning of anything they see or read. People think and visualise through constant creation and interpretation of 'signs', which enables them to communicate and express meaningfully. Anything can be thought of as a sign if it is interpreted as 'signifying' something, conveying or representing other than itself.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of the study of signs is given by Umberto Eco, according to whom: “Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a “sign” (57). In a semiotic sense, signs can be words, objects, gestures, paintings, and images. Anna Molka Ahmed’s work not only exhibits female perspective about the migrated land but also elucidates women’s dilemma as the subaltern - whose life is marred by the patriarchal society, yet who find a voice in this suffocated existence (Praveen 48).

Anna Molka’s unsettlement was both physical and emotional – the cultural shock of moving from London (the place of her birth) to Pakistan was also supplemented by an emotional detachment from her husband. As a young girl she believed marrying a man of similar interests will eventually put aside the conflict she faced at home by her father; Anna Molka Ahmed was constantly nudged and shunned by her father for her decision to study Arts, consequently leading to a sense of displacement at her own house. However, marriage with Sheikh Ahmed was not a compulsive outbreak from her authoritative father, but an act of love.

The illusion of eternal happiness (after marriage) was soon shattered when the realities of life dawned upon her- the marriage only proved to be a disappointment; “But Anna was not happy. That night (the day she got married) she wept quietly, pretending to sleep” (Husain 17). In her own words she describes her feelings as, “The sandbag wedding and Sheikh’s joking friend had got on my nerves . . . I had to be happy. I had thought I’d never be alone again, yet the lonely feeling persisted” (Husain 17). Husain writes about Anna’s unhomely feeling that she experienced during her stay at Amritsar; “Anna found no family feeling in the house and compared the dysfunctional family she had exchanged for the loving, intelligent family she had left behind” (Husain 21).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks applied to the artwork of Anna Molka Ahmed are postcolonial theory, particularly Bhabha’s notion of ‘third space’ and hybridity, and “Can Subaltern Speak?” by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to support the critical evaluation of the artwork. Homi Bhabha’s insight into the post-colonial experience (specifically third space) demands attention. Bhabha questions how identity is perceived in multicultural societies. Representatives of post-colonial societies and minority populations are defined by much more than their original ethnic traits. The fact is that everyone is shaped by their social experiences and heritage, as well as the experiences

and histories of everyone they come into contact with. There are no more distinct, monolithic categories of ethnicity.

Moreover, according to Spivak, subaltern women are subjected to oppression. They do not have proper representation, and therefore, are not able to voice their opinions or share their stories. Only a narrative of their own can truly represent their state of mind. This concept also correlates to the feminist stance that speaks about the woman's perspective to be heard. Hence, this stance is applied in the critical analysis of Ahmed's artwork to understand the need for women to speak through art and literature in order to be recognised and acknowledged.

Research Methodology

The research is purely academic as opposed to applied research. The research study applies semiotic analysis of Anna Molka Ahmed's paintings to project the imposed patriarchal mind-set of the society faced by her in her lifetime. Moreover, the concept of diaspora in relation to women is also scrutinised and discussed at two levels: firstly, it is examined in its literal sense, the dispersal of people from their homeland. Secondly, the diaspora in women is analysed as a psychological displacement and alienation towards their surroundings.

The primary sources for the research, as mentioned above, are Anna Molka Ahmed's artwork. The semiotic theory by Umberto Eco (Art as a System of Signs), alongside Bhabha's theory of third space and Spivak's feminist theory are incorporated as analytical tools to decode the symbols and motifs in her paintings. The research focuses on highlighting the analogous relationship between literature and art. Anna Molka Ahmed's paintings are also analysed focusing on the areas that delve into establishing the factual relationship between art and literature. Through this, the analogy is drawn between the mind-frame projected in the paintings that not only exhibit a female perspective about the migrated land but also sheds light on a woman as subaltern whose life is marred by the patriarchal society.

Discussion

Quest for Belonging: Analysis of *Roof Tops* and *The Final Parting*

The desire for a home or to 'belong' can be seen in Anna Molka Ahmed's several paintings. For instance, the painting entitled, *Roof Tops* (Fig.1), is a vivid indicator of the shelter she longed for, all her life. The painting is captured on canvas from a distance- the physical distance being suggestive of the emotive distance as she never felt at home at her in-law's house. The colour palette portrays an ominous mood- orange signifying dawn of the day and the roof-

tops are splattered with mud and algae. Moreover, the roof tops are very narrow and almost clogged, signifying her suffocated existence at that place. Chapman discusses how, through semiotic analysis, the realities of oppressed and the oppressor are revealed by decoding signs and symbols (287).

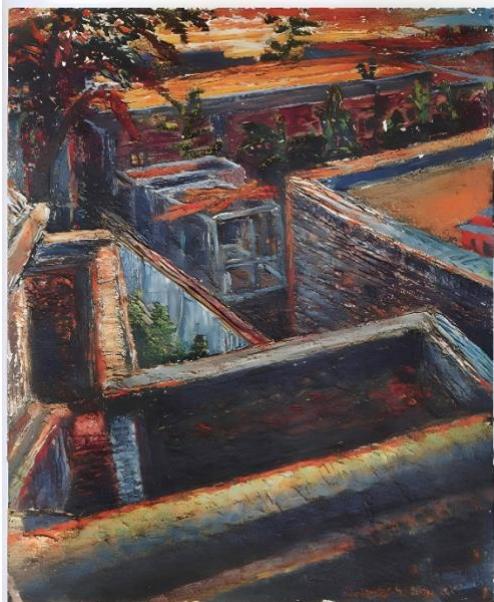


Fig. 1. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Roof-Tops*. Oil on canvas. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 91.

Thus, the study of signs makes concealed codes transparent and reveals the realities of life. In the biographical account of Anna Molka Ahmed, Husain expresses the arrival of Anna at her husband's house, "She followed her husband down the narrow lane...Anna was guided up to dark, steep, narrow stairs to the first floor" (Husain 17). She not only faced adversities of migration but also a sturdy antagonism in the form of chauvinism from her father and later her husband. From her childhood, Anna Molka questioned everything, from religion to life in general and her curiosity was a matter of profound concern for her father. Marjorie Husain writes, "While her father was convinced that marriage was the best career for a girl,

Anna Molka had dreams of her own. She was keen to study Art" (Husain 10).

Hence, from the outset, there was a rebellious and inquisitive streak in Ahmed. She wanted to explore the realm of possibilities; she longed for self-expression and artistic autonomy. For Ahmed, art was not only essential for individual liberty; it was a means of personal salvation and a way of contesting the patriarchal structures that oppressed her. Thus, the oppressive atmosphere of *The Roof-Tops* serves to reinforce the stifling existence that plagued Ahmed for years.



Fig. 2. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Final Parting*. Oil on canvas. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, pp. 194–95.

The agony of the futility of her life's altering decisions is projected in her painting, *The Final Parting* (Fig.2), painted after her divorce with her husband in 1952. Even after this excruciating event in her life, Anna Molka continued working in

the field Art - her unrelenting commitment to Fine Arts.

The colours used to depict her pain on the canvas are blue, grey and black. The painting is in a fluid state. The fish, a face of a man resembling an amphibian and the dark colours in the background suggest a sinister element to the whole concept. Water holds endless mystery; it represents that which is certainly there but cannot be seen. Water has also been taken as the source of life; however, in the painting it is represented as a menacing force. As a subaltern woman, Ahmed projects her dual suppression by the hands of patriarchal and colonial forces. However, she disrupts this suppression through art.

According to Greco-Roman mythology, fish is a symbol of 'change and transformation' (Davis). The dichotomy in the colours of the man's face distinctly projects the duality in his nature; "He had promised me so many things but never kept his promises" (Husain 54). The overlapping of the man's face with the fish shows the analogy between the two. Both are personified as evil entities. The heart-shape painted on the male's forehead indicates men being devoid of emotions and overpowered by apathy. Anna Molka's husband, Sheikh Ahmed, though being an artist himself, imposed restrictions on his wife and proved to be a stereotypical husband who did not consider his wife as his partner, rather a subordinate. In her own words, Anna says, "No lipstick, no make-up, and no jazz" - this authoritarian tone was a clear indication of her husband's psyche towards women (Husain 54).

Anna Molka Ahmed developed an awareness of the patriarchal culture after the unfortunate encounter with Sheikh Ahmed- in the form of marriage. On finding a job opportunity in Lahore, while Sheikh Ahmed was still jobless, she was reluctant as, “in a male dominated society, the idea of a wife working, and an unemployed husband appeared to her as a potential threat to her marriage. She had experienced Sheikh’s sensitiveness and her heart was fearful” (Husain 22).

Colour Imagery in Anna Molka Ahmed’s Artworks

The Portrait of Khalid Iqbal and Noor Alam (fig.3) is of great significance in terms of understanding the thought process of Anna Molka Ahmed. In semiotics, colours and how they express coded information is often looked at in terms of understanding the true meaning behind any piece of art/image/design. According to Maryam M. Darrodi, a Ph.D. scholar working on colour semiotics, this field resonates with the emotional and psychological response a color invokes (Darrodi, 84).

The faces of men in the painting are daubed in shades of blue; symbolism behind the colour blue has multiple meanings - often the concept superiority is taken synonymous to this



Fig. 3. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Portrait of Khalid Iqbal & Noor Alam*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 115.

colour. Moreover, a person born of royalty or in the upper class is termed as ‘blue blood’. Hence, the choice to paint the faces in blue reflects her perception of how men act as a superior authority in the society and subjugate women.

The geometrical pattern integrated in the men’s faces symbolizes a certain sternness akin to chauvinistic behavior. Hence, adding to the notion that Anna Molka

came to believe men as inflexible beings due to her personal experience with the two most important male figures in her life, her father and husband. Viewed in this context, art therefore became a medium through which Anna Molka as subaltern -a social group subjected to the domination of oppressive hierarchy (Ashcroft et al. 215) – asserted herself by means of “complicity between violence and discourse” (Spivak 36). The sternness evident in the painting highlights the wide chasm that exists between the men and women, primarily due to the unwillingness of men to acknowledge women’s individuality.

The painting *Kim's Gun* (Fig.4) is significant in understanding Anna Molka's psyche not only as an artist but the identity she unconsciously associated herself with. *Kim's Gun* in reality



Fig. 4. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Kim's Gun*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 100.

is titled as 'Zamzama' but it came to be known as *Kim's Gun* after Rudyard Kipling's childhood memoirs in which it was frequently mentioned. The nomadic life of Kim depicts a profound parallel with Anna Molka's life; an immigrant in the land whose identity is so intricately woven in the foreign land that everyone forgets he/she is a foreigner. Anna just like Kim is so immersed in the local culture that few realise she is a non-native

(Hopkirk 577). In addition, for an artist whose identity is ambivalent, it is quite complex to categorise under any specific nationality. It also gives rise to the possibility for an artist to project his/her creativity in this new ambivalent or hybrid space. The term hybridity refers to new transcultural identity constructed within the colonised land (Ashcroft et al. 118). Moreover, this term is mostly associated with Bhabha's analysis of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, which focuses on the interconnectedness and reciprocal connection of the partialities (Ashcroft et al. 118).

It is significant to notice that *Kim's Gun* is painted in the background in the scenic view of the road; people going on about their usual business during the day. This is a very bold statement by the artist; *Kim's Gun* (a metaphor for the artist's existence) is immersed in the surrounding to the extent that it no longer holds its status as a foreign piece. The third space becomes a medium through a hybrid's existence that generates a creative zone, "mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective space". Moreover, the created space propagates the blurring of existing boundaries (Bhabha 37). Therefore, Ahmed's art reclaims the space as a representation of culture and identity - stripping away the colonial symbolism correlated with *Kim's gun*.

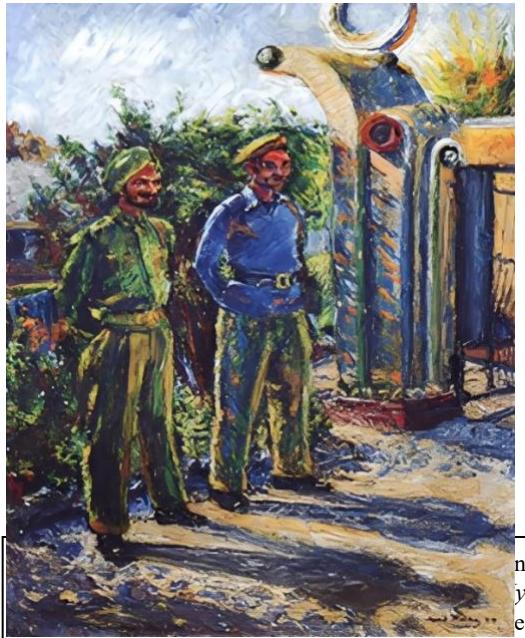
Resilience and Nationalism: Analysis of *The Jawan*



Fig. 5. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *The Jawan*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 197.

In the painting entitled *The Jawan* (Fig.5), a soldier is portrayed amidst a war scenario. The expressions on his face are of resilience and bravery. In this painting, Anna Molka expresses the brutality of violent actions and the heroism of the individuals. Most importantly, the “Jawan” also becomes a metaphor of her own resilience as she fought her own battles unaided, whether it was her decision to study the Arts, marrying Sheikh Ahmed or choosing a foreign land to reside permanently. The chaotic war scenario is depicted through a blend of blazing colours; red and orange. Marjorie Husain states, “She (Anna Molka Ahmed) often spoke of the bravery of others, but in my eyes, Anna Molka remains one of the most gallant women I have ever known” (Husain 68).

Anna Molka Ahmed explicitly projected her nationalism when the war between Indo-Pak (1965) took place. She was deeply moved by the violence that supervened. She not only followed the



Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 196.

news closely but also expressed her pride at the heroic bravery of the soldiers. The painting *Wahgha Border* pays respect to the soldiers serving their whole life in the defence of their country. She actively participated and provided her services in a top-secret assignment given by the government. Evidently, the army was short of tanks and Anna Molka and her students painted images of tanks on huge surfaces which were posted on sides of the vehicles. The images were so real that even seen from binoculars, the images seemed convincing (Husain 68). Anna Molka’s assimilation with the adopted land’s cultural

environment is not self-imposed, rather a willing deliberation, as Spivak is of the view that the identity of the subaltern remains complex and multifaceted; hence, assimilation becomes inevitable for the existence of the hybrid (Spivak 94).

According to Spivak, subaltern women are subjected to oppression (Spivak 94). They do not have proper representation, and therefore, are not able to voice their opinions or share their stories. Only a narrative of their own can truly represent their state of mind. Molka's paintings therefore, highlight the deep-rooted resilience of the diasporic or subaltern women. In a world that is predominantly aimed at silencing women and dismissing them as the other, Ahmed's paintings serve as a testament to the heroic resistance and self-assertion inherent within women in general and the subaltern women in particular.

Exploration of the Concept of Home: Analysis of *My Home* and *My Garden*

Due to her unrelenting quest for a homeland and a space that would give her a sense of belonging, Ahmed's paintings also frequently highlight and explore the complex dynamics underlying the notion of home, belonging, and homelessness.

In the past few decades, several theories and literature associated with the concept of home and

homelessness in relation to women have emerged. Home is not merely a tangible or concrete property, it is correlated with identity (Dovey 5). It is not until the individual is displaced voluntarily or by force from his/her homeland, that one becomes self-aware of his/her own sense of belonging. As Kaminsky states, "Uprooting (Displacement) involves bringing this change to consciousness in a particularly painful manner" (Kaminsky 34). This pain woven with the conscious self, awakens a deep yearning to belong in a context of a foreign land.

Anna Molka Ahmed's painting, entitled, *My Home* (fig.7) signifies her profound attachment towards the idea of home, articulated through the intentional use of possessive pronoun 'My'.

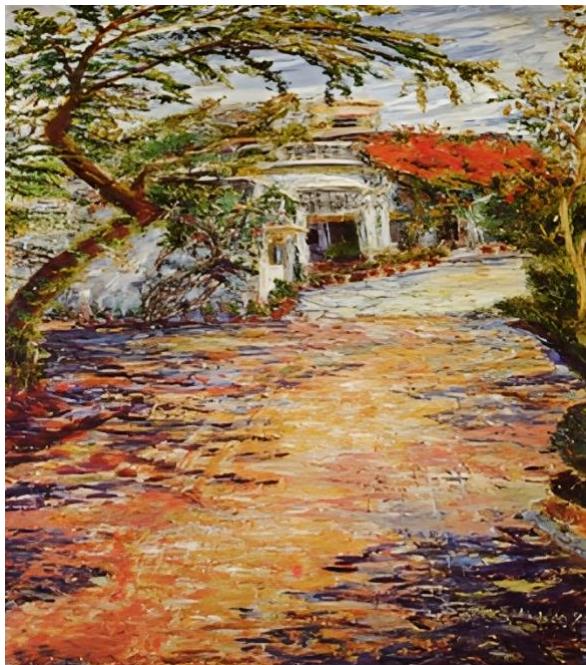


Fig. 7. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *My Home*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 92.

The house in the painting is surrounded by Nature, suggestive of the comfort and solace an artist seeks in Nature. The idea that is conveyed through the painting is that Nature does not reject the creature unlike society. It feeds and shelters, which is more than an artist can ever hope to receive from the society. The pathway towards a house indicates that her final resort is her home, and she strives for nothing else but the comfort of a home.

More so, the power of nature and landscape of an alien land have been the most recurrent motifs in the paintings of Anna Molka Ahmed and the feeling of belonging is transmitted through the beauty of landscape. For Ahmed, the beautiful landscape is not inanimate but a palpable, healing entity that offers comfort and solace- like a loving mother.

In some instances, the landscape serves as a compassionate witness to the silent suffering and the unarticulated loss experienced by women. Nature and landscape's warm embrace thus, serves as an anodyne amidst the profound, unsettling alienation experienced by the subaltern women.

My Garden (fig.8) also represents the concept of Nature as a healing entity. Similar to Keats,

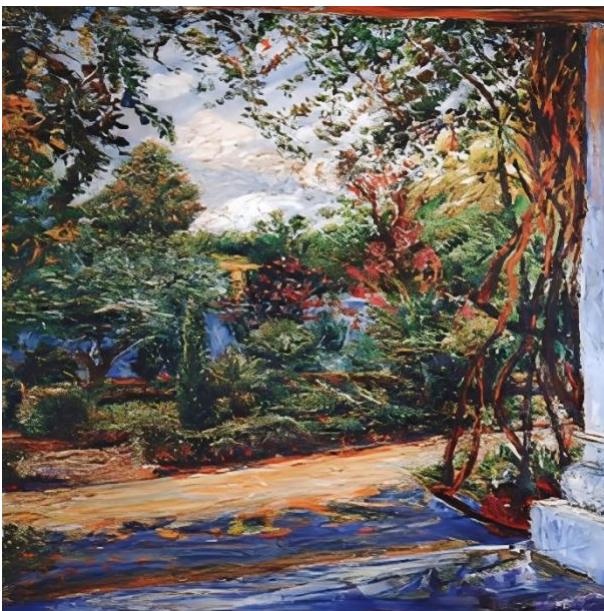


Fig. 8. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *My Garden*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 106.

Anna Molka also expresses the idea of Nature as an escape from the realities of life. The painting depicts a lush, green garden with vibrant colours for flowers and trees. The clear sky also indicates the clarity that textures her frame of mind while surrounded by Nature. Nature provides both a fleeting yet memorable moment of pure happiness, and a lasting sense of comfort and calm, because it provides what is required. Moreover, it was while painting in her garden that it dawned upon her that her final recluse is in Pakistan; "Seated in her garden. She blissfully painted her house and its surrounds, trees dappled with sunlight, grassy patches and bright flowers. At these times she knew she could

never live in England; her life and her work and her home was in Lahore" (Husain 70).

Identity in Transition: Exploring Metamorphosis in a Series of Self-Portraits

Throughout history, renowned artists - from Leonardo da Vinci to Rembrandt, Van Gogh to Frida Kahlo- have attempted to paint their self on a canvas. Self-portrait is a form of art that artists employ to express their true self. It is an artist's window to his/her soul, vision, and life.

Self-portraits force artists to confront who they are, as opposed to their perceived self. The most successful artists, whether painters, writers or musicians, are those who are able to truly reflect their public and private persona (Crozier and Greenhalgh 29). Another reason to explore this style of artwork (for an artist) is to confront the fears. An artist who can successfully create an honest portrait of him/herself will have an easier time creating other honest types of art. Creating this type of portrait is one way for an artist to explore personal growth.

It can be used to explore new concepts and radical ideas. The artist can later look back at these artworks to see how he or she has changed, along with how his or her perceptions of the



Fig. 9. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Self-Portrait 1*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 202.

self have changed. How a person sees him/herself and learns to express that over time are both captured in the art of the self-portrait. The chronological series of self-portraits by Anna Molka also gives an insight into the metamorphoses of her personality over the years. The first portrait (fig.9) depicts a young version of Anna Molka. Though in the portrait she is looking away, yet her facial expressions reveal a kind of defiance against the orthodox norms of the society, initially faced by her. The somber colour palette reflects her inner turmoil. Her eyes indicate someone lost deep in thought- a soul in quest of a sense of belonging. The prevalence of shadows in the portrait, reflect her struggle with her environment and her deep-rooted desire to pursue a life worth living. The dark colour palette also highlights the

dark forces of hopelessness, loneliness and an agonizing sense of despair.

The prevalence of somber colours serves – both in terms of the dress she is wearing and the background- epitomize her deep-rooted sense of feeling like an outsider amidst a society that overwhelmingly disapproves of independent women who relentlessly pursue their dreams and vision.



Fig. 10. Anna Molka Ahmed, *Self-Portrait 2. The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 203.



Fig. 11. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Self-Portrait 3*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 203.

The second portrait (Fig.10) reflects a mature version of her self; painted in soft hues (white and sky-blue) with her hair untied. Thus, a gradual change (or metamorphosis) can be seen – a young, defiant girl to a mellow-confident woman. She is looking upfront though the expressions in her eyes are of a woman who has suffered, yet she is firm on her ground. The colours in the second self-portrait are more vibrant. She uses white as the colour of her

dress. White is associated with peace and serenity that is also reflected through her portrait.

The third painting (Fig.11) is very crucial as it depicts an enormous change in her personality. It shows the artist in a direct, frontal pose with a grave expression. The bookshelf at the back reflects her profession in Academia. Her eyes in the portrait are full of contempt yet they are also reflective of a woman who stands tall despite all troubles that she had faced in her life. She paints herself in a monotone colour (yellowish mustard) which stands out as a whole, reflecting her strong, resilient persona.

In effect, these portraits showcase Ahmed's transition from a silent woman - uncertain and unsure of her potential- to a towering academic and artist who has found her own voice. The resilience and resolve that Ahmed gained over the years, is evident from the subtle transition from Fig 9 to Fig

11 – the metamorphosis from a silent woman with an averted gaze to a strong, dynamic female artist who has dared to confront the forces of oppression and can consequently face the world without hesitation or without any inkling of uncertainty and self-doubt. The yellow colour also

reflects a sense of optimism and hope – a marked transition from the somber colour palette evident in the first portrait.



The fourth and the final portrait (Fig.12) of Anna Molka unveils herself as a person who has transitioned from a girl with a myopic view of the world to a woman who is fully satisfied with whom she had become. The warmth in her smile and contentment in her eyes are an indication of a person who found peace in her final years. Anna Molka has also painted trees in the background which again emphasizes the fact that she found comfort in Nature. This final portrait reveals Ahmed's calm,

Fig. 12. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *Self-Portrait*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 204.

serene demeanour – the demeanour of someone who is wise enough to accept life on its terms and who has been able to elicit a sense of profound peace after undergoing a series of debilitating struggles. The colours of her clothes (blue and green) also blend with the backdrop of natural scenery,

portraying her oneness with Nature.

Anna Molka Ahmed's artistic venture expanded across varied subject matters; hence, the subject matter became a visual echo to her soul. One consistent theme in her paintings in her later years was religion. Art and literature have always been integral to religion. Kandinsky, discusses the notion of inward gaze which originates from the collapse of science, morality, and religion.

This inward gaze stimulates a spiritual awakening which is mirrored through art and literature (33). Whether artists saw their journey as primarily personal, or whether (like Kandinsky) they saw the artist as a kind of prophet in the vanguard of humankind's spiritual development, many of the great artists of the twentieth century saw their art in spiritual terms.

Anna Molka Ahmed was also greatly influenced by religion. In several of her later paintings, she explores her relationship with religion and the pivotal role played by religious teachings in her life. Her religious paintings explore the themes of spiritual ascendance and awakening, an individual's relationship with God and the myriad facets of the Sufi epistemology. In her religious paintings, she seems to be exploring the concept of salvation, forgiveness, and

penance. Instead of merely focusing on religious dogma, Ahmed sought to unravel the essence of religion and spirituality.



Fig. 13. Ahmed, Anna Molka. *The Kaaba*. Oil on canvas, n.d. *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window: Anna Molka Ahmed*, edited by Marjorie Husain, Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 2007, p. 206.

Anna Molka has painted several religiously inspired paintings that explore the concept of Hell, Heaven and the Day of Judgment. Her beloved painting, as she stated herself is *The Kaaba* (Fig. 13). She paints the Kaaba as the centre of whole universe. Anna Molka remained a devout Muslim throughout her life and on numerous occasions took comfort in prayers (Husain 11). It was through art that she was able to vent her feelings and the act provided a kind of divine relief as she felt rejuvenated while painting. The very act was therapeutic for her; she forgot all her pains

and problems while being immersed in the act of painting (Husain 77).

Conclusion

To conclude, Anna Molka Ahmed went through a process of homelessness

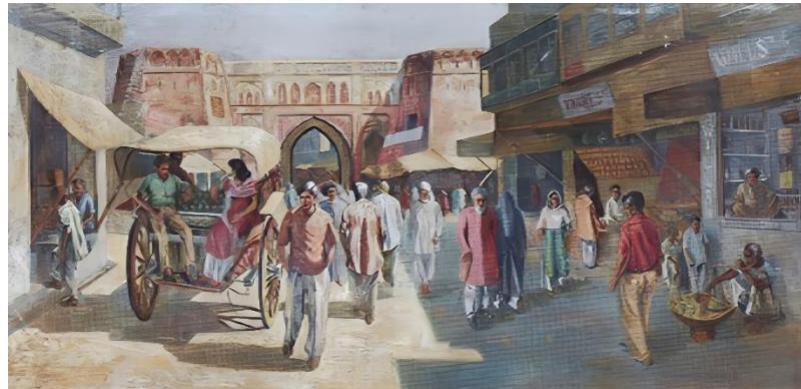


Fig. 14 Ahmed, Anna Molka, “Anna Molka Ahmed”, Oil on Canvas, NA, Tahira Ayaz, *The Sun Blazes the Colours through My Window Anna Molka Ahmed*, Marjorie Husain, 218. Pakistan: Ferozsons Pvt Ltd, 2007.

(displacement) and her art expands on the experiences of finding her place in a foreign land. Moreover, her paintings describe mixed reception which she received in an unknown land and on experiences of rootlessness and the search for identity which resulted from displacement and cultural

diversity. The research portrays the perspective of a subaltern (initially a non-native) in a South Asian context. The painting by Aslam Minhas, entitled *Anna Molka Ahmad* (fig.14) is quite

poignant in this context as it projects a scene of a local market with several people, portraying an assimilation of the artist

(Anna Molka) in her surroundings (Husain 218). Minhas, a native of Pakistan, views Anna Molka Ahmed as part of his own land. This does not convey a negative connotation of assimilation that negates the artist's individuality, rather it portrays a willing assimilation of a non-native artist - as Anna Molka made a conscious decision to live in Pakistan- she felt that the newly established Arts' department in Lahore needed her supervision. Thus, it was the sense of belonging to the field of Arts that compelled her to return to a land where the seed that she had sown in the ground had started to flourish.

Therefore, Anna Molka Ahmed adapted to the culture of the new land and crafted a new identity as a 'Pakistani' artist. She could arguably be termed as a diaspora artist; however, her identity - expressed through her artwork - demonstrates her willful immersion in Pakistan. Ahmed's metamorphosis through pain is exhibited through her arduous physical and emotional journey. However, this metamorphosis of a hybrid is perceived as a positive notion as it elicits a realm of creativity and experiences of hybridity through the analyses of paintings. The work of Anna Molka Ahmed not only reflects her personal journey as an artist but also echoes her true reflections as an immigrant in this land. Therefore, contributing immensely to the genre of hybrid Literature emerging from Pakistan. Anna Molka Ahmed is regarded as a 'Pakistani' female artist because of her enormous contribution to art and literature.

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