

AN ANALYSIS OF INTELLECTUAL ALIENATION IN THE CHARACTER OF USMAN IN *KHWAB-E-HASTI* BY MIRZA MUHAMMAD SAEED

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Abstract:

This study explores the theme of intellectual alienation in the character of Usman in *Khwab-e-Hasti* by Mirza Muhammad Saeed. It examines how Usman's heightened intellectual awareness, moral sensitivity, and critical outlook distance him from society, relationships, and inner harmony. The novel portrays alienation not merely as an emotional state but as a consequence of conscious thinking in a socially fragmented and value-deprived environment. Adopting a qualitative and textual-analytical approach, the research highlights the conflict between individual intellect and collective social norms. The study argues that Usman embodies the dilemma of the modern intellectual whose awareness leads to isolation, existential unrest, and a continuous search for meaning. This analysis contributes to understanding intellectual alienation as a significant theme in modern Urdu fiction.

Key Words: Intellectual Alienation, Usman, *Khwab-e-Hasti*, Modern Man, Existential Crisis, Self and Society, Contemporary Urdu Fiction.

INTRODUCTION:

Mirza Muhammad Saeed wrote the novel *Khwab-e-Hasti* in 1905. Before Mirza Saeed, no significant work had been undertaken in the field of Urdu novel-writing regarding the interrelationship between philosophy and psychology. A deep interest in human nature and human psychology is evident throughout Mirza Saeed's novels. The protagonist of *Khwab-e-Hasti*, Usman, is also deeply engaged with philosophy and psychology.

The novel reflects those scholarly aspects of psychology and psychological consciousness, including elements of psychoanalysis, which later emerged as a formal theoretical discipline; Mirza Saeed had already explored these aspects in a practical literary form. The awareness and insight that Mirza Muhammad Saeed presents regarding the human mind are clearly manifested in the characters of his novel.

It is entirely accurate that psychology exerts a profound influence on the lives of Mirza Muhammad Saeed's characters. In the novel, the author not only presents an elevated and sublime concept of love but also highlights the reality that the underlying cause of restlessness and deprivation in the lives of many young people is often failure in love.

The protagonist, Usman, is beautiful, intelligent, and well-educated, yet his aesthetic sensibilities, poetic imagination, and weak will give rise to psychological conflicts. His first meeting with the Raqasa Hosan Afroz stirs intense

emotions within him, and he remains lost in thoughts of her day and night. After Hosan Afroz returns to Lahore, Usman's personality becomes enigmatic; the complications of life appear unresolved to him. At certain points, he even seems dissatisfied with religious and worldly matters, as well as comfort and peace.

In psychological terms, he suffers from schizophrenia, a condition in which the individual becomes inclined toward isolation. Mirza Muhammad Saeed portrays Usman's state of anxiety and seclusion in the following manner:

"At this moment, I am completely alone, yet the truth is that even now there are some people a few steps away whose breathing I can distinctly hear in the darkness of the night. Nevertheless, I feel an unusual sense of solitude. This loneliness is not connected to the physical world but relates solely to the heart and mind. There is a void in my heart which the mind is incapable of filling."⁽¹⁾

Usman's condition forms the basis of his psychological fluctuations. He even expresses doubts and skepticism regarding religion. According to his perspective, all the problems in the world stem from religion, which compels humans to adhere to beliefs against their own will. Usman considered it his right to enjoy the pleasures of the world and, therefore, was strongly averse to the regressive attitudes of the religiously orthodox. He expresses his inner sentiments in the following words:

"The reality, as I see it, is that the world is a beautiful entity. Its charm and allure captivate the senses. Religion teaches us to focus solely on the life to come, but who can live in the present while depending entirely on the promise of the hereafter? There is an English proverb: "Two birds in the hand are better than ten in the bush." There is no reason why we should not appreciate the beauty of the world. One may pass through enchanting scenes with eyes closed, and like a devout Christian elder, take pride in this carelessness. One should not ignore beautiful things merely because religion instructs us to walk with a lowered gaze, turning the world we live in into a kind of hell in the hope of paradise. Yet I say again, my salute to such religion... For our youth, irreligion is not only excusable but indeed inevitable."⁽²⁾

Similarly, Usman did not consider it wrong to interact with courtesans or independent women. He believed that:

"Chastity and virtue are merely accidental possessions. If a person slips two or three times in a lifetime, it does not mean that the capacity for goodness and righteous conduct no longer exists within them."⁽³⁾

A study of Usman's doubts and skepticism regarding religion, along with his views on courtesans and independent women, reveals that his personality is marked by a profound duality. This psychological conflict is largely influenced by his two close friends, Badr al-Hassan and Adrian. Regarding the impact of these two figures on Usman's character, Ali Abbas Husaini observes that the interplay of Badr and Adrian significantly shapes Usman's thoughts, moral outlook, and emotional responses, contributing to the internal contradictions and duality evident in his personality.

"Both of them have performed the roles traditionally assigned by the religiously devout to the angels of good and evil."⁽⁴⁾

In short, Usman's character progresses through evolutionary stages in the novel. His independent thinking and rebellious attitude toward religious teachings, combined with his mental and psychological complexities, make his weak faith a significant factor in the shaping—and at times distortion—of his personality. He even engages in discussions on religion with his friend Adrian, yet he is unable to provide a coherent direction to his scattered thoughts. These indecisive and conflicting ideas repeatedly undermine his decisions.

In psychology, this state of fragmented thinking is referred to as Decidophobia, a condition in which an individual is unable to articulate their confusion and internal conflicts in appropriate terms. Usman expresses his difficulty in the following manner:

"It is difficult to express my thoughts in words. It seems as if either there is a deficiency in everything in the world, or there is a lack within our hearts that dulls the perception of goodness."⁽⁵⁾

The above quotation also demonstrates Usman's despondency. After his separation from Hasan Afroz, he appears so disillusioned that he harbors neither hope for success in worldly affairs nor optimism regarding the hereafter.

Mirza Muhammad Saeed, in his novel, depicts an era in which Western ideas had so strongly influenced the younger generation that they became increasingly detached from religion and, in their pursuit of modernity, fell into moral and psychological disorientation. This disorientation, in turn, became a major source of restlessness and anxiety among the youth. The author presents Usman's character as a symbol of this very generation.

Usman's misguidance and moral confusion entangle him so deeply that finding a stable path forward becomes nearly impossible. In essence, he simultaneously experiences diverse and conflicting emotions. On one hand, his father, Ishaq, has contributed to the flourishing of mosques and religious institutions, yet he remains unable to understand Usman's inner emotional state. Usman records his condition in his diary as follows:

"My father is entirely incapable of sympathizing with me, for he himself is absorbed in his own thoughts. While I long for beauty and love, he is consumed by his zeal for establishing religious endowments, and particularly, for the construction and upkeep of mosques."⁽⁶⁾

This comparison of circumstances further intensifies his confusion. Usman finds himself caught between competing forces. On one hand, his father, due to his religious inclinations, exerts a certain attraction for him; on the other hand, a conversation with a cleric unsettles his thoughts, leaving him in a state of extreme restlessness. In his search for solace, he is even compelled to visit a church. In psychological terms, such a state is referred to as ambivalence.

“Ambivalence refers to the simultaneous existence of conflicting feelings, attitudes, or desires toward a person, object, situation, or idea. An individual experiencing ambivalence may feel torn between opposing impulses, leading to indecision, hesitation, or inner tension.”(7)

Usman expresses himself in the following words during his inner conflict:

“At times, religion also appears adorned in the guise of beauty, forcefully asserting its influence. Even today, near the church, I was so overwhelmed by religious impressions that I became oblivious to the world around me. The lowered gazes and humble postures of the worshippers, along with the enchanting melody of hymns in praise of God, completely captivated my attention.”(8)

This inner conflict not only intensifies his mental tension but also obstructs his willpower and decision-making abilities. Usman is so consumed by the anguish of solitude and restlessness that, when he finds no confidant, he turns to his diary, recording his intimate thoughts and thereby relieving his psychological burden.

After parting from Hasan Afroz, Usman becomes captivated by the tresses of Shamim in his search for love. Like Hosan Afroz, Shamim is also a dancer, but there is a significant difference in their temperaments and habits. Hasan Afroz embodies loyalty and selflessness, whereas Shamim is guided by self-interest in every matter.

In the novel *Khwab-e-Hasti*, the novelist also highlights the differences in the sexual psychology of men and women. Just as men and women are physically distinct, their sexual psychologies differ as well. Men’s emotions, unlike women’s, tend to be intense and impulsive, often leading them to lose control. Their emotional continuity is limited. Simone de Beauvoir explains this distinction as follows:

“The male sexual impulse emerges sharply, like an arrow, reaches its peak in climax, and then rapidly disappears along with the accompanying excitement and lust. The pattern of sexual activity in men is thus limited and discontinuous.”(9)

In his novel *Khwab-e-Hasti*, Mirza Muhammad Saeed explores the individual’s internal conflicts while simultaneously engaging with the themes of religion, philosophy, and psychology. The effects of religion and spirituality on an individual have always been diverse. Faith and worldly life can coexist harmoniously, yet they can also be in conflict. Human actions and moderation serve to balance these forces, creating alignment between the spiritual and the temporal. However, extremism invariably erects a significant barrier between the worldly and the religious spheres.

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