

# Vision and Blurriness: A Postcolonial Study of Uzma Aslam Khan's Novel *The Geometry of God*

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**Abstract:** The aim of present research paper is to challenge the 'Vision' of west through metaphorical representation of Mehwish's blindness. The researcher intends to focus upon the use of blindness, which through performance and functional equivalency produces challenge to vision (Eurocentrism). The re-understanding encourages her test the marginalization or "othering" of the blind by deconstructing the myths about visual impairment. Dr. Kenneth's concept of 'blindness' is taken as theoretical framework. Further, Schor's concept of 'blindness as metaphor' is also taken to support the main argument of the research. Dr. Kenneth Jernigan in his book *Blindness as Metaphor* challenges the traditional concept of blindness. As previously, it is described as 'disability to see something' [1], lose or deformity of eyesight. He emphasized to not define blindness merely "in medical and measurable terms something which must be defined not medically or physically but functionally" [2]. Presented thesis has taken blindness as a metaphor to counter attack the European narrative of 'enlightenment' as it functionally failed to enlighten the 'other' civilization. Uzma Aslam Khan through her implicit characterization and metaphorical treatment blindness is challenging the oculo-centrism. Thus, through physical blindness and functional capabilities of Mehwish, metaphorically Khan challenges the Western mindset of enlightenment.

**Keywords:** Blurriness, Vision, Oculo-centrism, Othering

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## 1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, South Asian Literature is rising and advancing quickly everywhere throughout the world as distinct collection of writing by concentrating on numerous cultural, social, religious and contemporary perspectives. Under the umbrella of South Asian Literature Pakistani, Indian, Bengali, Nepalian, and south Srilankan writing are on the lead with their famous scholars, who have maintained their artistic customs. Out of this ordinance of writing, Pakistani and Indian fiction share numerous literary and stylistic attributes due to their mutual same pre-partition common history, their experience of same culture, colonial heritage and language sensibilities.

In India, writing in English had risen as a different body amid the colonial timeframe with the distinguished writers like Malik Raj Anand Raj Rao, Kamala Das and Markandeya, proceeding with this convention of writing in India in English are artistic figures like Khushwant Singh,

Arundhati Roy, Amitav Gosh, Juma Leheri and Anita Desai.

Discussing Pakistani literature in English, Pakistani then again, too had its glad literary figures, writing in English around then in colonial period. Ahmed Ali, Kaleem Omar and Bapsi Sidwa were first to begin this convention. Following this convention are the voices of scholars like Moniza Alvi, Tariq Ali, Hanif Qureshi, Sara Slueri, Bina Shah and Kamila Shamsie. Pakistani fiction is as of late radiating up with youthful voices Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, Mohammed Hanif, and Uzma Aslam Khan as a third era of authors writing in English. In the case of living in Pakistan or not, their fiction or compositions share a similar social, political, social points of view. They share mental, profound and social ties and roots with Pakistan as their country and local place.

In contemporary situation, numerous youthful authors have risen on scholarly skyline to add to Pakistani writing in English, giving it a worldwide acknowledgment with their exceptional style of composing. Mohsin Hamid is the most

particular and critical among them. He has picked new method of composing and flexible style to Pakistani fiction in English with his introductory novel *Moth Smoke* [3]. The magnificent book has practically managed subject of clash of identity experienced by middle class through introduction of class framework in Pakistani society featuring the inlet among have and have not. Another young author, born in Gujranwala, at that point later relocated to UK to get education at the University of Manchester is Nadeem Aslam. Beginning from *The Season of Rainbirds* (1993) to his the most eminent *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), presents cultural, religious and social insights of Pakistani society and struggle for identity is a major concern. In *The Missing slate*, a famous magazine, Waqas Khawja tributes Pakistani fiction writers:

In a country where it is often the breakdown of law and order, rampant intolerance, violence against women, persecution of minorities, and lack of common sense that gets reported in the local, no less than in foreign, press and news media, here are people of astonishing courage and flair, doing some admirable work.

Postcolonial writing deals with framing of identities, the writing issues of modifying, interpretations, connection among country and nationalism. It is a most overwhelming type of writing and it has an incredible intrigue. Postcolonialism generally manages numerous ideas like social, political, geological, mental and post-structuralism and so on. It is additionally significant writing which helps in understanding both 'colonizer' and 'colonized' in numerous worries like instruction, governmental issues, topography, culture and traditions.

The question remains here to be discussed is what is meant by term 'postcolonialism'. Postcolonial theory became part of the critical toolbox in the 1970s, and many practitioners credit Edward Said's book *Orientalism* as being the founding work. Homi. K. Bhabha affirmed that the term postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that the form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonized Third World 'comes to be framed in the west' [4].

Eurocentrism is the discourse that stresses European concerns, culture, and values at the expense of others [6]. It utilizes Europe as a cultural as opposed to a cartographical articulation, which fuses the purported "West," as such, Western Europe and North America. Eurocentrism accept that Europe is humanized and has been since forever and that European progress has a one of a kind authentic preferred standpoint that prompts its lasting predominance over every single other culture. Eurocentrism purifies European history dismissing its dull sides by thinking about them as uncivilized. In the meantime, Eurocentrism neglects the accomplishments and commitments of different societies. *Orientalism*, the hypothesis and the act of speaking to "the Orient" in Western idea, is a debatable idea. In the aftermath of the decolonization time frame in the second 50% of the twentieth century an expanding assemblage of scholastic writing delivered by researchers of Orientals has tested the

legitimate cases and learning that have been created in the order. So on with the sights, Spivak's concept of *Subaltern* is worth-able to be mentioned as she puts it that Europe has always concerned Orientals as 'low Ranked', and call them 'the center of knowledge and vision' [7].

## 2. Literature Review

Uzma Aslam Khan is the writer of four books, *Trespassing*, *The Geometry of God*, *Nobel Rot* and, most as of late, *Thinner than Skin*, long listed for the *Man Asian Literary Prize*. *Trespassing* was shortlisted for the 2003 Commonwealth Writers' Prize and *The Geometry of God* was one of the *Kirkus Reviews'* Best Books of 2009, winning a bronze medal in the *Independent Publisher Book Awards, 2010*. Uzma Aslam Khan's peripatetic way of life, moving among east and west, has impacted something beyond her fiction. In her novels, there is strange use of metaphor which she plays throughout the book. She explicitly deals with geographical, historical understanding of Pakistan, sexual desire and acts are filled with betrayal. As Taha Kehar in *Hindustantimes* (2018) says, "I've always believed that Uzma Aslam Khan's work is rich with nuance and verve. The *Geometry of God* is a fascinating read that draws on history and crucial political debates." [8]

Since, *The Geometry of God* (2008) is opened for literary and topical concerns, so plenty of research works have been directed to decide distinctive parts of content. A portion of the works are cited to beneath which are the most recent and thought about significant by the researcher.

A research study related to *The Geometry of God* is *Blindness Re-Visited: a Study of Uzma Aslam Khan's the Geometry of God* by Dr. Neelam Jabeen. She has taken a new perspective and this paper plans to contemplate blindness as a physical impairment and as a metaphor in *The Geometry of God* by Uzma Aslam Khan. The paper utilizes both medical and literary discourse to give utilitarian meaning of blindness, rather than entirely restorative definition. The paper initially builds up the ground by characterizing blindness and after that examines the selected text in detail to show how the writer reinterprets blindness as a physical impairment by testing oculo-centrism, and extends it metaphorically to whatever remains of society. She, taking much of insights from the Dr. Kenneth Jernigan's concept of blindness as he says, "something which must be defined not medically or physically but functionally", she challenges the vision of society and justifies the blindness of Mewish, who being blind performs all the function of normal person.

*Deep topographies in the fiction of Uzma Aslam Khan* (2011), the research work conducted by the researcher, Ananya Jahanara Kabir is another noteworthy work related to the concerned text. This article analyzes the books *Trespassing* (2003) and *The Geometry of God* (2008) by Pakistani writer Uzma Aslam Khan, and explicitly her arrangement of a complex symbolic construction from prehistory, geology and history. Drawing on the fossil rich soil of northern Pakistan and the Arabian Sea coastline in the

south, Khan depicts a deep topography for Pakistan as a source of emotional and symbolic re-rooting. Adjusted to vernacular wellsprings of aching and want, this profound geography offers a method of being a "genuine Pakistani" option in contrast to Islamicist self-fashioning procedures. This procedure of re-rooting must be viewed as a reaction of a post-Partition age of Pakistani social makers to the changes and movements of 1947. Breaking down it subsequently encourages us divert Partition Studies towards methods of elucidation of the connection between memory, overlooking, and recalling explicit to Pakistan.

There is another valuable research work *A Comparative Analysis of 'The Geometry of God and a Case of Exploding Mangoes' in the Framework of Postmodernism* (2016) presented by Fahmida Manzoor. Very artfully, the present paper plans to draw a similar investigation of Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Geometry of God* and Mohammed Hanif's *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* as Postmodern writings. *The Geometry of God* and *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* are principally set in the setting of 1980s, era of General Muhammad Zia-ul Haqin Pakistan. Uzma Aslam Khan and Mohammed Hanif show the postmodern components in their chose writings deconstruct the extremist meta-stories and raise the issue of pluralism by producing smaller than usual accounts through the postmodernist techniques of pastiche and parody. This paper endeavors to feature the recorded components of 1980's Pakistan, which are mocked by Uzma Aslam Khan and Mohammed Hanif in their books *The Geometry of God* and *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. The fabulous stories and belief systems are caricatured in an extremely amusing, energetic way by Uzma Aslam Khan and Mohammed Hanif and the smaller than normal accounts are created to offer voice to the subalterns among the powerful groups. Uzma Ahmed and Mohammed Hanif disassemble the twofold restrictions of us and them and feature the voice of subaltern as opposed to the powerful groups. Postmodernism addresses the customary standards and societies and presents the possibility of numerous fact and substances. Postmodern writing defines the low and high culture using Pastiche. The postmodern scholars utilize the instrument of spoof and historiographic metafiction in this manner revamp history and offer voice to the hushed and imperceptible subaltern gatherings of the general public. The postmodern historiographic metafiction opens up conceivable outcomes of different translation of the history for the perusers and presents a selfreflexive investigation of the writings and spoofs the history to subvert the ordinary musings and legitimize the caricatured item. Postmodernism manages history as confirmation and fiction as veracity and along these lines re-compose the history to exhibit it through fiction.

A research *Uzma Aslam Khan's Trespassing: Changing Cultural Structures/Changing Identities* by (2016) has been penned down by Omar El Aaiun. This article plans to investigate the distinctive signs of social identity in the novel *Trespassing* composed by the Pakistani author Uzma Aslam Khan. Through perusing this bit of writing, the investigator

gets information of the cultural identities that one topographical and culture, for example, the city of Karachi can tolerate vis-à-vis the interior and outer variables that tend to reconfigure the space and additionally the procedure of the development of social personality. The fundamental inquiries tended to in the novel are worked around the development of the social character and the variety of statements/voices of personality that one land, national and social structure, for example, Karachi can grasp; and the pictures and portrayals of the idea of home that be a tease the creative abilities of the disjoined personas in the most private minutes. The epic, in this way, gives a scope of personalities which are an inescapable result of the procedure of social, social and diasporic developments and the progressing procedures of character arrangement and home portrayals.

Out of the galaxy of research studies done on the author and on this text; the few valuable research works have been cited. Though much research work has been done on the selected text with reference to different thematic aspects, but still there is gap left. To fill that, the researcher in this thesis, has taken a new perspective as a research domain that is vision and blurriness: A postcolonial study of Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Geometry of God*.

Tough there is great work have been done on this particular topic by African and Sub-continental writer by applying the theories of critics such as Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. But skillfully, this paper will investigate the margins. Moreover, *Blindness* will be revisited through applying the concept of Dr. Kenneth and Dr. Neelam Jabben. The research hopes to contribute a new perspective in the existing body of literature. At the one hand, this thesis would add to the body of the Pakistani literature, literary criticism, cultural studies, on the other hand the importantly it will challenge the existing wrong concept about "other". The research hopes that it would be a source of guidance for those who study South Asian and Pakistani Literature. It would also be a positive and fruitful addition to new emerging genre.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research paper is qualitative in plan and descriptive in nature, and dependent on textual investigation of the text *Geometry of God* by Uzma Aslam Khan, a Pakistani Postcolonial novel and a historic tale of General Zia's era. The text will fill in as essential information. The literary examination as an exploration technique has been utilized in this examination contemplates. Plus, *A Definition of Blindness*, by Dr. Kenneth Jernigan and *Blindness Re-Visited: a Study of Uzma Aslam Khan's the Geometry of God* by Dr. Naleem Jabben has been taken as the theoretical framework of this exploration to demonstrate that so called prejudices of 'Eurocentric' that others are uncivilized and blind is wrong and radical thought. Additionally, Schor's *Blindness as Metaphor* has also taken to strengthen and dismantle the 'marginalized' arrogance.

#### 4. Analysis

Dr. Kenneth Jernigan in his book *Blindness as Metaphor* challenges the traditional concept of blindness. As previously, it is described as 'disability to see something', loss or deformity of eyesight. He emphasized to not define blindness merely "in medical and measurable terms [but to see it as] something which must be defined not medically or physically but functionally". So, the common man's definition is contradicted to those of Dr. Kenneth's definition. Therefore, to stand against this traditional concept of blindness he comes to three fundamental propositions:

1. To be blind does not mean that one cannot see.
2. It is possible for an individual to have perfect sight and yet be physically and literally blind.
3. It is possible for an individual not to be able to see at all and still be a sighted person [9].

After the exchange with the understudies and coming to understanding about the recommendations, Dr. Jernigan characterized blindness in this manner: "One is blind to the extent that the individual must devise alternative techniques to do efficiently those things which he would do if he had normal vision" [10]. The meaning of blindness given by Jernigan is real and not figurative, as he himself guarantees in the article. Blindness, in the same way as other different types of medicinal diseases, has likewise been utilized as a representation in our everyday discussions. In linguistics a metaphor is defined as "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain" [11]. So using blindness as a metaphor would mean using the entire conceptual domain of blindness to refer to some other conceptual domain (s) of knowledge. According to Kovecses, this would form a "conceptual metaphor." For example, 'ignorance is blindness' can be considered a conceptual metaphor. Kovecses also distinguishes between conceptual metaphor and a metaphorical linguistic expression. Considering the example that I have provided (ignorance is blindness), 'groping for words,' or 'you see what it means' would be considered metaphorical expressions based on the conceptual metaphor of 'ignorance is blindness.'

Further, Schor understanding also can be analyzed through given passage:

*Blindness must have at first referred only to the deprivation of the sense of sight; but he who does not clearly distinguish ideas and their relationships; he whose reason is disturbed, obscured, does he not slightly resemble the blind man who does not perceive physical objects? The word blindness came naturally to hand to also express this deprivation of moral sight. And how without these obligatory metaphors, without these catachreses, would once have succeeded in retracing these ideas. [12]*

This passage of Schor clearly defines blindness as metaphor. If this is what blindness has come to be perceived as, how would a medically blind person feel when referred to as blind? I cannot vouch for its universality, but in many cultures blind people are not referred to as blind anymore because of the stigma attached to it and if one does refer to a

blind person as blind in their presence, it is thought to be impudence and carelessness on the part of the speaker. Instead other synonyms for blindness are used that are not used as metaphor (in Urdu language, Na-beena instead of casual Andha. Lexical item Andha is metaphorically used for all the characteristics that Schor has quoted in the above excerpt. Na-beena on the other hand is used only for those who have lost their eyesight. Literally both the words mean the same, but one is an entire conceptual domain because of its metaphorical associations while the other is only a word used to refer to a condition).

Moreover Schor herself says "in fiction blindness is always feminized" [13]. So with these helping words it is safe to say that all the association with the blindness as a metaphor in one way or the other marginalizing or other the legal mind. The fundamental aim of this paper is to produce challenge against the Eurocentric mindset and deliberately to disrupt the existing pride of most civilized people.

*The Geometry of God* is the story of four characters—paleontologist Amal, her blind sister Mehwish, their heretical grandfather Zahoor who is also a paleontologist, and Noman. It is set in the backdrop of General Zia's dictatorial regime in Pakistan and his imposed religious fundamentalism supported by fundamentalist religious groups. Along with many themes of the novel like love, religion, and science, 'blindness' runs as a motif in the fabric of the entire novel. It is through the blind character Mehwish that Khan introduces blindness as a physical condition, reinterprets it, and extends it metaphorically to other members of the society.

In the very early of the novel reader comes to know about the blindness of Mehwish. "Mehwish was blinded by the sun" [14]. It is paradoxical as sun is the absolute opposite of darkness, so where there is sun, there is no haziness; visual impairment then again may represent obscurity, so sun being the reason for darkness is a paradox and from consequently onwards, Khan always deconstructs the conventional importance of the word blindness. Her Nana Zahoor also explains this condition as "her eyes receive light but transmit no image". While on the other hand, her sister Amal thinks that she has "sun inside her." So, although she physical impaired and she has no visual deficiency internally. And this is right at great extend in postcolonial context. Khan metaphorically decelerates the existence of Britain on subcontinent and other parts of world. Who entered the horizons of different regions of the world with the flag of enlightenment and civilization but they were exact opposite to it as Mehwish is exact opposite to blindness. They, in the name of enlightenment disrupted the culture, religion, rituals and social other of 'others'.

Seeing is quite often connected with eyes (or feeling of sight). Khan anyway destroys this relationship as she relates "see" with every single other sense and even memory. So, visual deficiency, from Khan's perspective, isn't a powerlessness to see. This takes us back to Jernigan's claim: "to be blind does not mean that one cannot see" [15]. At the point when Amal draws an image of Mehwish with a sun inside her, her granddad asks her to "go over it again,

pressing harder with [the] pencil this time, she will feel the marks and be able to see something". So seeing here is generally associated with sense of touch. Even more, Amal draws things with pen and Mehwish is quite able to read all patterns other use of her senses. More than this, she judges color by their scent. Khan also describes the significant quality of her character to reiterate the arbitrariness of signification. Mehwish insists that blood is white because it smells like decayed meat and decayed meat is white. Mehwish also memorizes routes to different places she visits because Khan has Amal observe: "geography first exists in the mind". So, for the character of Mehwish, art of knowing is totally different from the philosophy of intelligence and taste as she explains in Urdu as "Khyal and Zauq". All the previously mentioned models are to help my case that Khan re-translates blindness. The re-understanding encourages her test the marginalization or "othering" of the blind by deconstructing the fantasies around visual impairment. Khan clearly is challenging the oculo-centrism. Through physical blindness and functional abilities of Mehwish, metaphorically challenges the Western mindset of enlightenment.

Eurocentrism (likewise "Western-anti-extremism") is a political term speeded during the 1980s, alluding to the idea of European exceptionalism, a perspective fixated on Western human progress, as it had created amid the stature of the European frontier realms since the Early Modern time frame. Moreover, Be that as it may, there is additionally a specific origination of socialism which returns far in the development and which epitomizes a colonialist Eurocentric view-point inside it. This pattern should be found.

It essentially completes three things. It right off the bat regards European culture and history as a point of reference in forcing outside meanings of different social orders, with the goal that they are considered 'in reverse' or 'dormant' if their history doesn't contain explicitly European highlights, similar to feudalism. Besides, it resolutely manages political economy just as the most essential procedures are those inside or among the industrialized countries, rather than among them and the abused countries. It ignores the pretended by expansionism and the slave exchange and still today played by variables like unequal trade as a basic and essential reality of the industrialist method of generation. Thirdly, this negative pattern peripheralises the abused countries politically, regarding them as alleged 'holds' of the upset and subordinating their battles to the alleged interests of the working class in the 'propelled' nations. This Eurocentric pattern betrays both the mankind and the logical soul which ought to describe socialism, and close its eyes to the substances, to the living quintessence of mankind's history all in all.

Moreover, it was their belief that Europe is the center of knowledge and all the discoveries of the universe are made by Europeans. They have given birth to Newton, Darwin and Einstein and so to the knowledge of philosophy, science, art and so as it's their duty to take the charge of world in their hands [16]. But in *Geometry of God*, through the character of

Noman and Apa Farzana, Khan has challenged their pride of knowledge giver. As in chapter "Pure Science", Noman describes,

The Quran states: *Art thou not aware that it is God who has made subservient to you all is on the earth, and the ships that sail through the sea at His behest. (22:65)*

If ships sink, it is by His law. If they float, it is by His law. Which we cannot question or understand. Delete all the references to Archimedes and his so-called principles.

*It is He who holds the celestial bodies in the orbits, so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave. (22:65)*

If an apple falls from a tree it is His will. If it stays it is His will. Which we can't question or understand. Delete all the references to Newton and so-called concept of gravity.

*And all the beauty of many hues which He has created for you on earth: in this, behold, there is a message for people who are willing to take it to heart. (16:13)*

If color is perceived it is His will. If it is unseen it is His will. Which we can't question or understand. Delete all references to Newton and so-called wavelengths.

*Have you ever considered that seed which you emit? Is it you who create it- or are We the source of its creation? (56:58)*

Creation is His will. Destruction is His will. Which we can't question or understand. Delete all the references to the Darwin and so-called theory of Evolution.

## 5. Conclusion

From above quotations, criticism and citation it is quite clear that Khan has depicted Noman as demonic, anti-colonialist character. Who challenges that there is no great contribution of Europeans in the knowledge of the world but just naming the things, there, where everything is already present in the Quran. Karl Marx puts it forward like that "This Eurocentric trend is a dead weight and not fully right which needs to be over thrown if we are to make progress in this country. Even if the weight of imperialist ideology is so strong that we could not do this by our unaided efforts, fortunately in the field of revolutionary theory the situation is very healthy. An outstanding body of thinkers and leaders whose names are interwoven with the mass movement has come out of the Third World struggles, thus restoring the universality which should belong to a movement for socialism, and overcoming the alienation of part of humanity from itself which occurred due to colonialism and the slave trade." [17]

Moreover, this paper difficulties the "Vision" of west through allegorical portrayal of Mehwish's visual impairment. The researcher attempted to concentrate on the use of visual impairment, which through execution and practical equivalency produces challenge to vision (Eurocentrism). The re-understanding supports her test of the marginalization or "othering" of the visually impaired by deconstructing the myths about visual impairment.

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