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## **Desire For ‘The Other’: ‘Mimicry’ In Mason’s The Broken Road**

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***Abstract:***

*This research article aims at analyzing in detail the relevance of Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry in A.E.W. Mason’s The Broken Road (1907), a gripping romance of the Frontier. The Broken Road illustrates clearly Bhabha’s attempt to define post colonial mimicry and the inability of the colonial power to completely domesticate the other. Mason tries to maintain a distance between his English characters and the mimic man. Mimicry is not a constructive one, but destructive-it leads to degeneration, which is a part of the discursive frame work of colonialism. When the colonized desires to be a part of the colonizer in all respects, it leads to social ostracism or deterioration of the race. The key concepts have been harmoniously dovetailed with the issue of racial differences, the underlying theme of the novel.*

***Keywords:*** *Ambivalence, Colonialism, Degeneration, Deterioration, Mimicry.*

### **1.Introduction**

The word ‘mimicry’ can be defined as the art of mimicking somebody or something. In colonial discourse, it “encourages the colonial subject to mimic the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a blurred copy of the colonizer that can be quite threatening” (139). Homi J. Bhabha defines mimicry in the term of ambivalence as similar and dissimilar. Similarity refers to the resemblance between the colonizer and the colonized whereas dissimilarity points out that there is a difference between the master and the servant-“a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (86).

To Bhabha, mimicry is one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. “The effect of mimicry is camouflage ..... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human welfare” (qtd in Bhabha 85). Mimicry is defined as the colonized country’s tendency to initiate the attitude, behaviour, language and culture of the colonizer. This method of copying the person in power suppresses one’s own cultural identity and leaves the person to a state of confusion. To Bhabha, “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence” (86). Mimicry does not help anything to develop in a positive way and it hampers the growth of the ignorant natives. It produces neither identity (similar) nor difference (dissimilar) but only a sort of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry. In the process of metamorphosis, the mimic man becomes neither a part of his own society nor to the whites.

### **2.Mimicry In A.E.W. Mason’s The Broken Road**

A.E.W. Mason’s *The Broken Road*, set in the north-west part of India popularly referred to as the Frontier, deals with the issue of racial difference or hierarchy. It has two main characters Shere Ali, the prince of Chiltistan and Dick Linforth, an Englishman. They become close friends when they are educated in the same institutions in England. After his education in England, when Ali returns to Chiltistan, he realizes that because of his colour, he is considered racially inferior to the British. The novel revolves around Shere Ali’s anger and depression at the loss of his status in India and his rebellion against his colonial rulers. Shere Ali is sent to England to be educated at Eton and Oxford. The process of stepping into the shoes of the Other brings a rebirth. Shere Ali has been

renamed as Sherry Face which highlights the tendency of the Indian to conjure everything that is English. His tastes, behaviour, attitudes, opinions, morals and culture are fostered and pampered by the English ideals. When he returns to India, Shere Ali realizes that “in England, he is treated as an equal; here, in spite of his ceremonies, he is an inferior and will and must be so” (39). Luffe, the dying political agent in the novel, opines that education in England has made Shere Ali a stranger in his own land.

Shere Ali is Mason’s mimic man. He is a representative of “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect” (168). He places himself in between the governing British and the governed India. Shere Ali, a symbolic representation of the mimic man, makes the reader aware that “when we (Indians) come over to England, we are very fine people. Women welcomes us and are kind, men make us their friends, But out here! We quickly learn out here that we are the inferior people” (152). When he returns to India and mingles with his fellow beings he realizes that he has no existence in the East with western tradition and culture. He says: “when I left England I was in doubt. I could not be sure whether my home, my true home, was there or in Chiltistan. I am no longer in doubt. It’s neither in England nor in Chiltistan. I am a citizen of no country. I have no place anywhere at all” (161). It becomes clear to Shere Ali that in India he is no longer white and he is like the bheestie and the sepoy who is debarred from the privileges of the white colonizer.

“The English people are Bilati. They are foreigners. The place is sacred to the foreigners. It is Indian soil: but the Indian may not walk on it: no, not though he were born next door. We are the dirt beneath their feet. We are dogs and sons of dogs, and a hireling will turn our Princess from the gate lest the soles of our shoes should defile their sacred places. Since we cringe at their indignities and fawn upon them for their insults.” (274)

Sander Gilman has called Shere Ali’s character ‘the institutionalization of fear’ (the fear of degeneration). Mimicry, in one way or another, leads to degeneration. Shere Ali is not ready to face the reality that he is unacknowledged in the midst of British, only because he is an Indian. This truth leads to the degeneration of his character. His degenerate condition is evident from his preference for the company of the low class Europeans, the way in which he ignores Dick Linforth and his treatment of Violet Oliver. When Violet Oliver rejects his offer of marriage, unlike an Englishman, Shere becomes a villainous character who tries to kidnap her. Thus Shere Ali’s degeneration is evident in comparison with Dick Linforth. Bhabha’s mimicry echoes that the highest and the most evolved form is that of the white male colonizer and Shere Ali tries to mimic or

approximate them. Though Shere Ali tries to develop himself as an ideal Englishman, he becomes only a partial representation of the image of British. When Shere Ali desires to be the Other, he loses his own identity.

### **3.Conclusion**

The Broken Road deals with the subordination of the eastern countries in the hands of the colonial masters and the effect of this domination leads to mimicry. Shere Ali, the symbolic figure of the colonial community, feels frustrated and disillusioned due to his tendency to consider himself inferior. Even though he was educated in England and acquired English customs, values, and traditions, he was in a stand still. The identity politics of Shere Ali is clearly revealed through the concept of mimicry.

### **4.Acknowledgements**

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