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Harmain Rukh

Lecturer English

Department of English, National University of Modern Languages Rawalpindi
harmain.rukh@numl.edu.pk

Summayya Amra

Llanguage Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Lecturer English, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages Rawalpindi
sumayya@graduate.utm.my
sumayya.amra@numl.edu.pk

Munazza Mahmood

Department of English Studies (UGS) National University of Modern Languages
mahmood.munazza@yahoo.com

Abstract

Patriarchal system subjugates women while elevating the status of men to superior beings. Considering literature's power to affect people's perception, it has been used as an instrument to keep women in an inferior status. This has been done by portraying fictional androgynous female characters as evil, greedy and cunning creatures who would reach any lengths to achieve their malicious goals. After many years of feminists' struggle, the trends in writing have started to change and authors have started portraying women as strong, authoritative decision makers instead of the cliché representations that women had. Literature is an effective medium for bringing about change in a society and it is used in order to challenge and combat the stereotypical and oversimplified portrayal of women. This research analyzes *Moth Smoke* by Hamid and *Kartography* by Shamsie from the perspective of androgyny. Both of these novels apparently combat the stereotypical portrayals of women by giving them androgynous characteristics. However, upon an in-depth analysis, it is revealed that these novels also contribute to perpetuating the traditional gender roles and deteriorating the female image by giving them morally corrupt personalities and by negatively portraying their freedom. The real experiences of women remain unknown to the world at large because such novels play a significant role in totalizing experiences and in generalizing one thing over a whole group. The analysis of the texts is carried out on the basis of the conceptual framework which is grounded in Ruether's work on androgyny.

Key words: Androgyny, gender roles, stereotypes

Introduction

Androgyny originated from classical mythology and the term is used to refer to a person who possesses both male and female traits i.e., “instrumental as well as expressive” (Gianoulis 1). Authors have begun portraying androgynous women in their works so as to dismantle the long held stereotypical beliefs about women which state that women are “inferior to men” (Warren 172). Contemporary literature has also taken up the task of presenting to the world, women with stereotypically masculine characteristics like being assertive, authoritative and intellectual decision makers. Ruether argues that even with such portrayals, the status of women does not change as the women who are androgynous are given “negative and selfish” personality traits. This implicitly implies that androgynous women would bring negativity and mayhem in the world. This also reinforces the idea that men and women who conform to the traditional gender roles are normal, healthy and successful. In short, the novels i.e. *Moth Smoke* and *Kartography* maintain that women need to be subjugated and oppressed because if given “authority, power and voice”, they would bring “dysfunction” to the world (Ruether 337). So, androgyny, a positive quality is presented in such a way that a lot of negative and repulsive attributes of those women overshadow the positive aspects. These women are misrepresented and exploited by their own men, who play the role of oppressors by “imposing silence” on their idiosyncrasies (Tyagi 45).

Writers like Hamid and Shamsie have written novels in which they have broken the stereotypical portrayals of women and have presented female characters who are “androgynous” (Gianoulis 1). Women and men who conform to the traditional gender roles are portrayed in a positive light whereas those who do not adhere to the traditional gender roles are given negative representations. Previously, women were given very conventional representations like a meek, subjugated character tending to all the chores dutifully and feeling pride in doing all that along with receiving constant torture from their husbands. The characters who did not conform to the gender roles were presented as “social outcasts”, but with the changing trends in literature, contemporary writers have started portraying women in a different manner (Gianoulis 2; Silverio 18). Change reference and bring direct quotes. Today, the female characters are given unique features and are shown to be playing their role in combating and challenging the stereotypical portrayals that were given to women for a long time.

Moth Smoke and *Kartography* are selected because these novels are contemporary and depict lives of the younger generation. The stories of both “*Moth Smoke*” and “*Kartography*”, are accessible and apparently, simple. On a thorough reading, however, one gets the idea that the novels have more to them than meets the eye. The reversal of the “natural gender order” in literature is seen with suspicion and features like being “unnatural” and “alien” are associated with the characters that are androgynous (Hooke 5). Women who try to achieve their goals through traditionally “male channels” are labeled as sick, unnatural and wicked (Hooke 5). An analysis of the content and diction of the novels reveals that on surface level both the texts are challenging the stereotypes but on a deeper level, they are playing a significant role in deteriorating the image of androgynous women by i) giving them repulsive personalities and ii) “totalizing” the experience of a few women to the whole female community (Lau 573).

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Research Methodology

The study aims at highlighting the representation of androgynous women in contemporary literature. The researcher has selected *Moth Smoke* from Hamid and *Kartography* from Shamsie. Taking Ruether's idea of *androgyny*, this article conducts textual analysis of the selected texts to highlight the misrepresentation of androgynous women in Literature. Textual analysis allows for a description of the "content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts" (Frey et al. 1). This study focuses on the way contemporary writers contribute to the deterioration of the female image in societies. Where apparently these novels are combating the stereotypical portrayals by presenting androgynous characters, the women who are androgynous are given negative and selfish personality traits. Such repulsive personalities given to androgynous women imply that if left unchecked, they would bring negativity and chaos. This also reinforces the idea that men and women who conform to the gender roles are "healthy, normal and successful" human beings (Ruether 335). In short, the novels insinuate that women need to be subjugated and oppressed because if given "authority, power and voice", they would bring "dysfunction" to the world (Ruether 337). The study examines the way such representations by contemporary authors contribute to totalizing the experiences of a few to a whole community, thereby damaging the image of the whole group.

Aims and Objectives

- 1) The study aims to investigate the role of contemporary literature in tarnishing the image of androgynous women by giving them repulsive personalities.
- 2) It also seeks to examine the way such texts contribute to perpetuating the traditional gender roles in society by portraying androgynous women as negative characters.

Literature Review

Humans are categorized on the basis of sex and gender and each of the categories i.e. male/female, is associated with varied characteristics extensively recognized by different societies. "Instrumental/agentive" attributes like "goal orientation, assertive activity, self-development and separation from others" are marked as masculine whereas; "expressive/communal" traits like "emotionality, selflessness, sensitivity and interpersonal relations" are tagged as feminine (Cook 472). According to the stereotypes regarding gender roles, the term femininity encompasses traits like empathy and nurturance while the term masculinity envelopes attributes such as authority and dominance. Androgyny, on the other hand, refers to an amalgamation of the masculine i.e. "instrumental/agentive" as well as feminine "expressive/communal" personality traits (Cook 472).

Androgyny is an ancient notion which is embedded in Greek mythology and was first mentioned in Plato's Symposium. Three instead of two sexes were identified in Greek mythology where the third one was the androgyne, a joined male/female that was split as a consequence of the wrath of gods. Humans were punished in this way because they were deprived of the "perfect third sex" (Allcroft3). According to Greek mythology, human beings were set up by the furious gods to yearn for their other half and to try to reconvene the constituents of the so-called perfect sex. The reunion is perceived to go beyond the needs of "sexuality and reproduction" and is seen as encompassing spiritual as well as psychological completeness and wholeness (Singer 83).

A lot of work has been done on feminism or women rights for that matter, as women still make up one of the marginalized sections of society. Wollstonecraft's efforts paved way for equal rights

for women. It was pointed out that there is no biological basis for women being intellectually inferior and that it is crucial for women to use their intelligence so as to be able to survive effectively (Wollstonecraft 78). Numerous attempts to objectify women have led to a denial of their basic needs and ergo, feminists like Wollstonecraft strived for status and rights for women equal to those of men. The 19th century brought with it a redevelopment of feminist maneuvers. The false idea that women are dumb and “intellectually inferior” was regarded as a manipulative attempt by patriarchy to exercise power over the other gender (Gornick 32). Such false conceptions are culturally constructed and have nothing to do with “biology” (Gornick 32).

Literature represents characters adhering to the traditional gender roles as *good characters* while portraying androgynes as *bad characters*. This is where the fissure takes depth and individuals resort to staying within the limits prescribed by the traditional gender roles. This article is grounded on the conviction that Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* and Shamsie’s *Kartography* apparently challenge the stereotypical portrayals of women by attributing androgynous features to women. However, it will be unveiled that there are certain negative representations of androgynous women which tarnish their image in society.

***Moth Smoke* by Hamid**

“Moth Smoke” by Hamid is a realistic depiction of the contemporary world which is “plagued with gun-running, drug-trafficking, large-scale industrialism, commercial entrepreneurship, tourism, new money, nightclubs, boutiques...” (Desai 1). “Moth Smoke” presents Pakistan as a multi ethnic country where people from different backgrounds and cultures have settled but the country is “divided even against its own self” (Desai 1). The events of the plot revolve around a young man named “Drashikoh Shehzad” (Hamid 11). The protagonist is an ex-banker and a drug addict particularly marijuana. Events in his life start taking turns when his childhood friend Ozi, real name Aurangzeb (Hamid 14), arrives in Pakistan and the two friends meet. During the course of the novel, “Daru” (Hamid 14), develops feelings for Ozi’s wife, “Mumtaz” (Hamid 14) and eventually the two get physically intimate. Mumtaz is depicted as an androgynous woman as she is assertive and likes doing things the way she wants to. This woman is different from ordinary or rather normal women as she does not let anything not even her duties as a mother come in the way of what she desires. The novel has instances where Mumtaz places her personal preferences as priority like when Daru and Ozi were about to drink, Mumtaz, even though her husband told her to tend to the child, went on to get the bottle as she also wanted to drink. She is a capricious character in terms of her behavior and mood. She will not allow anybody, not even her husband, to order her or force her into doing something she does not want to do. She writes under the pseudo name “Zulfiqar Munto” (Hamid 16) without informing her husband. Apparently, this woman has succeeded in achieving her actual potential by realizing her hidden strengths. She manifests her inner personality through writing which is a source of liberation for her. So, Mumtaz is seen as a representative of modern, androgynous third world women who have this quest for seeking their inner selves and who try to become better professionally. Such women are self-sufficient and enjoy rights equal to those of men (Ruether 337).

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***Kartography* by Shamsie**

The other novel selected by the researcher is “Kartography” by Kamila Shamsie. A strained relationship exists between the protagonists, apparently soul mates, of the novel; “Karim and Raheen” (Shamsie 9). Bias on the basis of race and ethnic violence are among the other issues addressed by the novel. As the story progresses the two childhood friends i.e. “Karim and Raheen” develop feelings for one another (Shamsie 9). As the events unfold it is revealed that the relationship of their parents was affected by the “partition” of the East and West wings of Pakistan (Shamsie 26). This was a major cause of the tensions which existed in Karim and Raheen’s relation. In the end, however, the relationship problems of the four friends are solved and things are apparently settled. The focus of this article would be on the female characters of this novel. One of the protagonists of the novel i.e. Raheen, her mother and Karim’s mother are androgynous characters. The mothers fulfill their maternal roles but also voice their feelings and emotions. This is evinced when Karim’s mother “Maheen” leaves her husband, marries another guy and moves to “Boston” (Shamsie 143). She gave preference to what her heart desired instead of thinking about what the world would say when she leaves her son. Maheen tried to bear things but eventually when she was unable to manage and fix the tensions that existed in her relationship with her husband, she divorced him and started anew. A gender role reversal is found in Raheen’s house where her mother is an authoritative and assertive figure whereas her father is a kind of a defeated person who has given up on his life and has given in to the circumstances that he was in without protesting. These women are a representation of modern, androgynous women who are unlike the conventional women i.e. meek, emotional, submissive and shy. Raheen’s mother married Raheen’s father after breaking her “engagement” with Karim’s father as she wanted to be happy instead of worrying about the society (Shamsie 165). When her daughter Raheen, after learning the truth about her parents’ marriage, wanted to leave she did not prevent her from leaving because she wanted her daughter to be decisive and self-sufficient as she was. Nothing, least of all emotions prevent these women from doing what they want to do. They know what is best for them and do not let societal pressure get in the way of what they want.

Even though the female characters from both the novels are androgynous which would imply that the novels are combating and challenging the stereotypical portrayals of women but these characters are given negative personality traits like selfishness, immorality and apathy. These characters cause harm and discomfort to the other characters mainly males who are portrayed as much better, innocent human beings. So, such representations contribute to demeaning women and also to justifying and perpetuating the traditional gender roles by posing androgynous women as social outcasts and conventional women as normal.

Stereotypical Portrayal

The selected novels i.e., “*Moth Smoke*” by Hamid and “*Kartography*” by Shamsie play a part in destroying the image of androgynous women. On surface level, these novels are concerned with portraying women as androgynous beings which is a laudable aspect. The female androgynous characters of both the texts i.e., Maheen, Mumtaz and Yasmin give preference to what they want instead of paying heed to the societal norms and expectations. These women have multitasking abilities as they do not give up their careers and do not just stick to their maternal roles. However, a certain disturbing aspect is associated with their personalities and that is the dark, negative and selfish side of their character.

Mumtaz, the female protagonist of the novel “Moth Smoke” by Hamid is shown as a writer as she writes under the pseudo name “Zulfikar Manto” (Hamid 16). Writing, especially when it is related to social evils is good and adds positive points to someone’s personality. This would make “Moth Smoke” a kind of text that challenges the stereotypes regarding gender. However, the fact that Mumtaz (Hamid 14) used to write behind her husband’s back is questionable and once again adds to the stereotypes regarding gender. Even in the contemporary society, women are most of the times identified by their relationship to men and a wife writing without telling her husband is unacceptable. The writer depicts her as a person who is least bothered about what her husband would feel and say if he found her writing. Mumtaz is portrayed as a person who does not think about how her actions would despoil her husband’s reputation which is, once again, not a good representation. She even goes to Darashikoh’s (Hamid 11), house almost at midnight which is late, questionable and unacceptable. Her surprise visit shocks Daru who thinks of possible explanations for the surprise visit and for his friend’s wife calling him out “in the middle of the night to go for a drive?” (Hamid 40). This scene shows that the male character takes societal norms, values and restraints into consideration as he is concerned that people will talk if they find out about it. All of this contributes to a positive image of the male character and a corresponding negative image of the female character that does not care about societal norms. Mumtaz does not feel embarrassed in calling a man she does not really know and asking him to take her to “Heera Mandi” (Hamid 40). Even here Daru i.e. the male character is considerate as he thinks about his friend Ozi (Hamid 14), who would not want his wife out in the streets of “Lahore with single men while he is out of town” (Hamid 40). Once again the woman is doing things without her husband’s knowledge and in his absence which contributes to the negative portrayal. Mumtaz wants to interview a prostitute so that she can write about her and have her story known to the public. This is a form of public service but the way the author portrays Mumtaz and her actions is questionable as cruising around with men at night is not acceptable (Hamid 40). Such negative depiction not only reinforces Ruether’s idea of androgyny as a “bad” trait, but also conveys that those androgynous women are not normal and they should be avoided and restrained otherwise they would bring “dysfunction” and “chaos” to the world (Ruether 337).

Maheen is a female character from Shamsie’s novel “Kartography”. She is the mother of the male protagonist of the novel i.e. Karim. The depiction that she gets as a woman is that she is an apathetic woman who gets a divorce from her husband and marries another man without even considering what her actions would do to her son Karim, who is a teenager. This reinforces the “good/bad woman” binary (Ruether 334) as a good woman would never give up her maternal duties and would not give priority to her desires. A “good woman” would consider everyone around her particularly her son and husband instead of focusing on her personal wishes (Adikaram 54). Unfortunately, societies give more importance to the societal “norms, values and restraints” and therefore expect people to conform as well (Cislaghi and Heise 409). Women who prioritize their desires are labeled characterless, greedy and “selfish” monsters as is evident from the following lines by Auntie Runt; “Maheen, an adulteress! Has she no consideration for her son?” (Shamsie 71; 143).

Mumtaz is depicted as a mother who continuously denies her role and responsibility as a mother. She prefers to stay away from her son ‘Muazzam’ and has even hired a nanny for the little boy as she cannot stay with the child all the time. Her husband i.e., Aurangzeb, is more alive to his responsibilities as a father because he is the one who puts the baby to bed when Mumtaz refuses to

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do so (Hamid 14). He even refuses the cigarette which Darashikoh offers by saying that since he is a father now, he has to "be more responsible" (Hamid 16). Mumtaz, on the other hand says that she has not "quit" smoking and that she is "dying to smoke" a cigarette (Hamid 16). These instances show that the woman does not care for her behavior in front of strangers and not even her child. Her preferring a cigarette instead of putting her son to bed highlights the idea that she is not worthy of being a mother as she cares about herself only which places her in a negative position. Aurangzeb, is a very responsible, caring and loving father as he quit smoking because of his son. This must have been difficult for him since he was a "half-pack-a-day man" kind of smoker and he went from that to no smoking at all (Hamid 16). Sacrifices, according to the stereotypical "gender roles" are expected of mothers whereas the fathers are expected to be ignorant (Aguilar et. al 2). Hamid reverses the traditional gender roles but in doing so he portrays the androgynous woman as a negative selfish character.

Mumtaz is shown as a mother who is least bothered about her son's grooming and learning. She refers to the nanny as "a lovely lady who cut the umbilical cord" and her presence helped Mumtaz because she can "disappear for an entire day" and Muazzam would not even notice the absence of his mother (Hamid 109-110). The mother instead of feeling guilty for the emotional detachment with her son is feeling relieved of the burden of responsibility. She would leave her son crying with the nanny and would come to see Darashikoh with whom she is having an extra marital affair (Hamid 120-121). Once gain such a representation is not very motherly and not very good in the eyes of society. Conventional mothers are overwhelmed with emotions when it comes to their children but Mumtaz feels burdened by her child. Leaving her son and going out to have "joints" with her boyfriend is an action that throws her down from an elevated status as a mother to a "slut" (Hamid 187; 177). This eventually connotes that all androgynous third world women would be the same. The author puts the opinion of the society into the mouth of Darashikoh who tells Mumtaz that what she did was not "motherly" (Hamid 110). Mumtaz is an archetypal modern androgynous third world woman but to stigmatize her actions and behavior in such a way does not do her any good. The author portrays Ozi as a simple, innocent man who is a victim in his relationship with his wife. The wife does not care about him, his emotion or his reputation and he is shown as a very loving husband who would do anything to make his marriage work (Hamid 77).

Both Hamid and Shamsie give Mumtaz and Maheen characterless personalities. Both of them were labeled as *sluts* by other characters of the novels. Mumtaz earned the derogatory label because she married a wealthy man, Ozi and people, particularly women, thought that she had found someone she did not deserve as the man was thought to be too good for her. Although Mumtaz married Ozi because she loved him at that time but the novel portrays her marriage to Ozi as a cunning act of vivaciously luring a handsome and rich guy. Once again Hamid puts the word of society into the mouth of an ordinary character who said that the slut i.e. Mumtaz "had bagged herself a prince" (Hamid 124).

Maheen, from "Kartography" broke her marriage, left her son and married another guy. Mothers especially in the Pakistani context do not usually do such a thing because they are more concerned about what the society would say. After Maheen went abroad, Raheen overheard people using derogatory and insulting language while referring to Maheen; "Maheen, an adulteress! Has she no consideration for her son?" (Shamsie 71). Marrying someone for love is not wrong at all and but women cannot do such a thing without bearing the consequences. So claiming that women have the

right to marry for love whenever they want does not hold true as societies are more concerned about the standards of “gender appropriateness” (Pauletti et al. 1). Again, Maheen is an androgynous woman who takes her own decisions but the fact that she left her son and went off to marry another man adds more negative points to her personality. This statement, “. . . Karim must have felt—perhaps still felt—to see them together. . .” (Shamsie 171), makes the situation even more heart wrenching. The repulsive personalities attributed to women are mainly the result of a denial of their maternal responsibilities. Karim is shown to be in great agony which even his friends can feel but the mother is living away with no apparent concern for her tormented son.

Another emerging issue around the world is extra marital affairs. Mumtaz’s affair with her husband’s friend Darashikoh is considered really bad and the fact that it was the woman who initiated it, “I want to kiss you”, “She kisses me” (Hamid 121), places the woman in the position of a culprit. Even in this relationship, the male character i.e., Darashikoh is the victim as the female character i.e. Mumtaz thinks of the physical intimacy as an activity to keep herself busy like an adventure that gives her pleasure. Darashikoh is emotionally involved in her but she is shown as simply using a man for personal benefit. Darashikoh was nothing more than a toy with which she played when she felt like it. Her thought process reveals that she did it because Daru was Ozi’s best friend and obviously, he would “keep his mouth shut” as he would never want his friend to find out about his relation to his wife (Hamid 132). For Mumtaz, this affair was an expression of her independence from the restraints imposed upon her by her marriage as is evident from this; “. . . being touched by another man, declaring my independence from the united state of marriage” (Hamid 132). Mumtaz tried to break free of the confines of society by doing things ordinary women would not. For her, this was all an adventure, a quest for self and an effort to identify her actual inner self. Self-identification and liberation of self from the confines of society through an extra marital affair is unacceptable in the third world context. Women in the third world countries cannot break free of the societal restraints without facing the consequences. Extra marital affairs categorize women as *sluts* and sluts are not respected anywhere. Her betrayal of her husband who was devastated mentally and emotionally, contributes further to destroying the image of the third world modern androgynous women.

The above-mentioned women are androgynous in that they make their own decisions and prioritize their personal feelings and desires. However, these women are given immoral personalities which make them unlikeable. An ignorance and denial of maternal roles and spousal duties with a corresponding struggle for self-satisfaction is what defines these women. Such representations are in no way combating the stereotypes regarding women. Such portrayals reinforce the stereotypes and confirm that women, if allowed to make decisions and if placed in authoritative positions would bring chaos and dysfunction to the world. Since stereotypically, women are considered to be “intellectually inferior”, they should not be allowed to make decisions because they would not be able to make appropriate decisions (Gupta et al. 1). Their freedom would negatively impact their reputation as well as that of the ones close to them. Such portrayals reinforce the stereotypes regarding female gender already present in society.

Conclusion

After many years of feminists’ struggle, the trends in writing have started to change and authors have started portraying women as strong, authoritative decision makers instead of the

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cliché representations that women had. Literature has been used as an effective instrument to keep women in an inferior status. One thing that the study unveiled is that even the different i.e., androgynous, representations given to women in literature do not contribute to breaking the stereotypes regarding women. This is because the androgynous women are given morally corrupt personalities which are unacceptable even in modern societies. Evidence can be observed in both old and new fictional characters like *Lady Macbeth* and contemporaries like *Mumtaz* and *Maheenas* evil, greedy and cunning creatures who would reach any lengths to achieve their malicious goals. Analysis of the novels reveals that androgynous women have no place in a traditional society i.e., the one functioning on the traditional gender roles because such women are considered selfish and therefore, do not belong anywhere. Keeping in view the impact of literature on thinking, negative portrayal of androgynes causes people to stay within their prescribed gender roles for fear of being abhorred, discriminated and cast out.

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