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Observing Representation of Women in Pakistani Context: A Postmodern Feminist Study of Kamila Shamsie's Novel Salt and Saffron

ABSTRACT

This study examines the idea of woman's empowerment and all transitions she can mold to get the ideal femininity for herself and the struggles required to achieve the ideals of self-realization. The protagonist of the novel, Aliya is a postmodern lady who is aware of her rights and social values and breaks the stereotypes of society and family traditions after her struggles. She raised her voice for all oppression and psychological suppression that was faced by her family and then by her, as they had no knowledge and right to question and fight for their values and rights. But Aliya as a postmodern lady questions all fixed values and norms which are faced by Pakistani women. Postmodernism is the era to question and challenge all existing ideas and concepts which are set, fixed, and followed by society. This study will deconstruct the binaries (violent hierarchies) of male/female, us/them, right/wrong, dominating/dominate, masculine/feminine, and superior/inferior and also questions the existing fixed cultural norms which are set for women only to be followed throughout her life.

Keywords: Postmodern Feminism, Domination, Deconstruction, Empowerment, Suppression, and Stereotypes.

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Introduction

This study develops the understanding of the representation of women and their traditional role more specifically in a patriarchal society. This is the aggressive mentality of society to judge and categorize men and women based on their socially constructed gender stereotypes. God has not created any human being inferior or superior; it is societal norms that define gender and name them. These stereotypes still exist in society even it's the postmodern era where things, ideas, and concepts are uncertain and challenged by people but then also females are struggling to get their free identity and equal rights. Oppression can be still observed in schools, workplaces, and in media. Society expects women as submissive daughters, obedient wives, and self-sacrificing mothers. This is our culture that labels both genders as masculine and feminine. Feminine is associated with weak females, sensitivity lacks decision-making ability, and dependent. While masculine refers to males who are strong, rational, powerful, and courageous. With modern times changes are coming, initially, women were objectified in literature through stage dramas. The best examples are the novels of Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, D.H Lawrence, and Jane Austen. In our Pakistani context power lies with male dominance, in media, schools, home, and workplaces male is dominating. This social and educational discrimination leads to high illiteracy. Mumtaz and Shaheen in their significant work *Women of Pakistan: Two steps forward, one step back* (1987) recorded that despite the difference in education, self-awareness, and professional skills women are still considered as common and still their lives are controlled by this patriarchy.

The life of a woman is not easy firstly she is being suppressed by her father or brothers and later by her husband. Women are weak and dependent this is put up in their minds the day a girl is born, her psyche is developed in the way further she sees her mother and elder sisters being quiet in front of all-male members, obeying their every decision even right to stop or began a family is not in women hands. We observe in Pakistani marriage invitation cards bride's name is not mentioned mostly, she is known by her father or family similarly when she dies no name on the grave, her identity is known by her male members of the home. Transitions came with postmodern feminism when feminists raise their voices for their identity and freedom same started depicted by modern writers in their novels too. It is females who first started realizing their marginalized identity and then started struggling to achieve an individual identity by breaking and reconstructing the binaries. Postmodernism is with a belief that we live in the fourth copy of reality, nothing is fixed, things and phenomena can easily be changed. There is no center; things that are marginalized can be in the center too, as there is a shift.

Writers like Judith Butler, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Linda Hutcheon along Kamila Shamsie started depicting independent and strong female characters because of the influence of changing times and giving awareness to readers about "New Woman". This study aims to reveal the breaking of violent hierarchies which are binaries set by the Pakistani culture or society of superior/inferior, right/wrong, masculine/feminine, us/them, male/female, and dominate/dominating by using the method of deconstruction by Derrida. Further, this study explores the novel *salt and saffron* more specifically female characters using the perspective of postmodern feminism. The protagonist of the novel seems to be an independent lady who rejects the historical aspects and cultural norms of her home and then of society. Aliya rejects the stereotyping of gender and tries to break the traditional gender roles and is represented as an independent strong lady. This study can provide new insights into Postmodern Feminism and gender studies. Definition of gender used to change with time and with different ideologies. The reader can find this study helpful in the Pakistani context and traditional women roles that how women are being represented differently through changing times and up till today. The novel *Salt and Saffron* are not studied before from the perspective of postmodern feminism and through the lens of deconstruction. The status and value of women are changing initially we see it from the eyes of males and now from a postmodern feminist perspective. Further, this study focuses on the well-known method of deconstruction by Derrida to reconstruct all violent hierarchies as nothing seems to be fixed or centered. This study is important because it empowers today's women with the writing support of Kamila Shamsie that women are not suppressed and overlooked now, they are breaking the fixed traditional roles, as Kamila empowered herself similarly she depicts in the novel through the character of Aliya, that today's girl is powerful and aware of her values and rights. She has to be strong if she wants an equal and better place in this stereotypical society. This study is centered on the novel *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie. It explores the representation of women which is portrayed by the female characters of the novel. How women are represented in English literature before and after postmodern feminism. In the early ages of literature, women were looked down upon they were marginalized and suppressed similarly, it is observed in the culture of South Asian countries where women are not treated equally. It further explores how changes came in fixed ideologies because gender roles are decided by society it is not the biological or natural system to be followed. Keeping in mind the thought of postmodern feminism, this study breaks the binaries of superior/inferior, right/wrong, us/them, masculine/feminine, male/female, and dominate/dominating. Feminists bridge the gender gaps right after they started realizing their existence and gave us the concept of "New Women" that is different from the women represented

earlier. This study sheds light on the postmodern perspective when the transition came with the belief that nothing is fixed and remains centered. Many writers have started depicting and talking about feminism in their works but Kamila Shamsie and her novel *Salt and Saffron* are best to take into considerations as she keenly observes the realistic presentation of Pakistani patriarchal culture where women are still in struggle to be free from the stereotypes.

Literature Review

According to Henry (2003), Feminine researchers and research participants usually face the issue of representation especially when it falls on the research to decide how to represent herself before her research participants because the researcher's identity affects the research process. Another problem the first-generation South Asian researchers face is that of language limitations because of a different race, ethnicity, and nationality. It suggests that to include women's experiences in the research account, fieldwork should be reconceptualized and women's problems should be labeled. Trollope (2001) believes that in different researches, women are reported with mental health sickness and disorders as a result of some social stress. Suppression can be observed in their health too here sometimes the cultural meaning is misunderstood which needs to be comprehended as it seems to be a cultural disorder. Researchers are writing such issues but this should be implemented, to give better health to women. Ahmed (2003) suggested that South Asian women in media and academic discourses are represented as fixed and victims of oppression and distress. They are sexualized. None of these representations confer to them social or political empowerment. They reinforce this process of objectification behind religious and cultural depictions. In Pakistan, Muslim women's challenges and identity development are still in process as it has limitations. According to Jamal Singh (2014), Women have always been held down in socially constructed patriarchy, traditions, and cultural ideologies. Her position is different in different regions and varies in situations. It also depends on their race, caste, and religion. Kamila Shamsie presents those female characters, which process the western approach to recognize themselves and their rights. She highlights the problems of female liberty, love, class division, and how women can strike a balance between tradition and modernity. Many South Asian female writers have given voice and power to their female protagonists emphasizing their individuality, and their efforts to seek autonomy maintaining the very code of their traditions. Naoko (2007) highlights, "As for gender issues, in the US and elsewhere, Christian faith has spurred many women into activism on issues such as Abolition, alcoholism, and prostitution. Such activism led to the development of organized feminist

movements". According to Elam (2006), Feminism and deconstruction are two different phenomena or perspectives; feminism is a political project or ideology whereas deconstruction is a philosophy that both go parallel. "Both theories describe observable practices and experiences from a meta-discursive position". According to Assiter (2005), Postmodernist talks about the deconstruction of grand Meta narratives. They study the human condition and mind in detail. Whereas feminist talks about class, race, and culture. Both theories and concepts challenge universal truth and power. Feminist shows the new paradigms of social criticism.

Yaqoob & Hussain (2012) believe Patriarchy as a part of Pakistani culture expects women to be ideally devoted, enduring, loyal, and self-sacrificing. Literature has perpetuated such images of marginalizing women and ensuring male domination. Kamila Shamsie always portrays strong women in her novels that bravely face the stereotypical ideologies of society. According to Zubair (2018), Imperialism and Globalization have affected a lot on the image of women. Transnational feminist has diverse women's realities to address inequalities across the world among various groups of women. Different themes are oppression, migration, Diaspora, religion, and society have frequently been presented in the works of Kamila Shamsie. Shirazi (2014) thinks South Asian literature is usually composed of diasporic citizens who are at the vantage point to keenly observe and represent the changing realities. South Asian writers discuss the image of women with the theoretical context of globalization and Postcolonialism reflecting the change in the perception of society. Their main purpose was to maintain a balance between modernism and cultural traditions by keeping the conflict of past and present in their minds. Gasman (2006) believes that the Representation of women varies in historical fiction and feminist texts, meaning how women are depicted before the 1970s and how after that. Today one can observe the change in patterns of women's representation. Different roles are observed in the main themes of novels like masculine and feminine, women's independence, absence of male characters, their role as a problem solver, women taking former education, also diagnosing their physical and mental health often ascribed to female characters in the novels. According to Marcu (2016), a unique category of the female character is described by different writers in postmodern texts. How women may emerge from their inner struggles and desire to improve. The main aim of writers is to show the dominating and subjugating women of today's century. This may be frustrating for south Asian society and stereotypical mindset people. Marchand (2003) suggested Postmodern feminists study the problems, marginalization, and development of third-world women. Liberal feminism is in favor of postmodern beliefs but Marxist feminist opposes the idea of postmodernism. Whereas postmodernism also talks about all changes and transition the world have. Postmodernism is a phenomenon or a social

concept which talks about “shift”. It has led to the fragmentation of the concepts of race, sex, and class, and denies the theories of Capitalism and Patriarchy. Hendricks (2016) said Derrida challenges the centering of anything, there is nothing fixed obtainable by the binary opposition which structuralism claimed to uncover hidden meaning in language. Derrida belief that deconstruction is not a method or a technique but a useful means of saying new things about the text. For Derrida, “the transcendental signifier (Logos) has always had a special relationship to presence for the West”.

Besides this, a qualitative research design is used in this study. Qualitative research design is used to unveil the topics and problems which referred to an attitude, opinion, and way of thinking of the ideas of readers. Descriptive and Predictive research can be obtained by the result of Qualitative research. This study is interpretative because it interprets the representation of women in Pakistani English literature. The source of data collection is the internet and study-related scholarly articles. Textual analysis is also used as a method for this study. It is a method that spotlights the text and its inter-textual context. The textual analysis goes well with this study because it brings attention to multiple versions of reality in the text. Mackee (2003) defines textual analysis as “is a way to gather information about other human beings to make sense of the world. It is a methodology for those who want to understand how members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of which they are and of how they fit into the world in which they live”.

Data Analysis

Deconstruction by Derrida is used to analyze this study. Deconstruction deals with challenging the interpretation of texts. Derrida believes that one word has a lot of meanings and significance and those meanings can be reconstructed. Nothing is fixed, dominates and there is no permanent reality and center, so meanings and phenomena can be constructed separately. Method of deconstruction is based on many concepts like Decentralization, logocentrism, Aporia, Binary Opposition, Grand, and Mini narratives, use of language in the text, Difference, and Metaphor, but this study is analyzed from the point of view of binary opposition and de-centering the logos of society which are beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge, which seems to be in the center as a fixed reality. The study deconstructs the binary logic and discursive power just to keep them in an equal place. The image and role of women were observed and judged from the eyes and mentality of patriarchy. Women were objectified in English literature and Pakistani society because it is set ideology that the female gender is weak and should be inferior, they need someone to guide and support them. This stereotypical ideology was changed with the movement of feminism in the eighteen century when few

feminists started thinking of their values and rights. Changes and advancements came in twenty century with the belief of postmodernism when attached to feminism. This modernity gives many rights and liberations to females, few started enjoying them. Postmodern feminism is with a belief that women are not marginalized and are not still dependent. Biologically differences are based on sex but society defines it as masculine and feminine meaning gender and gender superiority are socially constructed and this ideology is set by a patriarchal society. No reality is fixed and should always be in the center, things on margin can come into the center after reconstruction. Postmodernism is dealing with transitions and shifts so there is a shift in realities and phenomena too. Postmodern feminism believes that women should be economically, politically, socially, and psychologically free. Importance was given to equality of female gender and rejection of male dominance. Initially, patriarchal minds were controlling and shaping the society but with the awakening of women's rights and changing era women started looking at the world from their perspectives. Opportunities are given to women in voting, education, jobs, and family decisions. Feminism is not a single unified concept rather there is a multiplicity of voices and approaches within the field. Misrepresentation of women was corrected with the beliefs and ideologies of postmodern feminism. Late male authors started writing feminist texts and males in Pakistani society started supporting and motivating their women. Today women are still facing troubles and challenges in achieving their identity and valuable place in society but now the balance is maintained and differences can be observed in old traditional women and new women. Little confusion is faced by modern Pakistani women as societal and cultural norms cannot be ignored altogether but transformations can be made. New women are under the influence of imperialism, colonialism, globalization, and capitalism. Further Judith Butler (1990) laid the foundation of postmodern feminism with the exploration of traditional gender roles, deconstruction of violent hierarchies, and destabilizing gender categorization. Similarly done by some other famous theorists, Simone De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Virginia Woolf, and Kristeva. Toni Morrison also focused on marginalized women and empowered black women through her writings. Linda Hutcheon talks about ex-centric discourses keeping in mind the main aims of postmodern beliefs.

Salt and Saffron is a masterpiece of Kamila Shamsie, she beautifully depicted the life of a Pakistani girl who stays in the US for her education. Aliya, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to a traditional family that blindly obeys the societal norms and dominance of the male gender. She loves her country, food, culture, dresses, and native language but not those stereotyped ideologies and norms which are followed by her family especially Dadi, who seems to be an anti-feminist. Aliya's family inherited the dominance of males, patriarchal stress, and injustices. They never question their master (Nawab)

for his cruelty and injustices. They simply shape their lives according to what society asks them to do. *Salt and Saffron* is also known as a historical novel as it portrays the history of Shia and Sunni conflict, Akbar The Great, the story of partition and Subcontinent, Royal family culture and norms also the superiority of Dard e Dil palace. This all echoes historical elements in the novel. The novel shows the story of Karachi, Pakistan which is known for its larger population, it depicts the life of the poor who lives in the small area of Karachi, Liaquatabad from there the binaries of us/them and class discrimination started. Other upper class and modern people of Karachi think people from Liaquatabad as inferior and should be looked down upon. Suppression can be observed in every character in the novel like Taj never questions why his mother was raped by Nawab, this also shows his illiteracy and no rights. On part of Dadi, it is observed that she is a very noble and significant character especially when it comes to her historical letters, she often asks Aliya to study history but she being a feminist always rejects what comes to her forcefully. Dadi's dresses and choice of food were also very traditional and give the Pakistani touch, meaning wearing ghagra, playing sitar, and, eating Nihari and Aloo.

This novel is narrated by Aliya, who is the protagonist. She is observed very talkatively since her childhood and is known for her storytelling abilities in her college. Even she belongs to a traditional patriarchal society and family background where women are defined as male but then also she took a stand to go abroad for her studies and breaks the stereotypical ideologies of masculine and feminine. She became a strong and independent lady and calls herself a feminist meaning she sees the world from her perspective rather than males deciding for herself to be oppressed and suppressed. She sometimes feels frustrated by the superiority of Nawab, who shows power as a master even he was corrupted but still, takes pride in his identity and remains dominant. Dadi being an old woman cares about her family traditions and takes the suppression and dominance of the male gender.

This novel has shed light on how women were reflected in history, they lack subjectivity and were objectified as they were not aware of their rights and values to be equal to the male gender. This thinking developed with the wave of feminism and later by Postmodern feminism when society molds the changes and improves the ideologies. Representation of women in literary texts is explained in two ways: good girls, who are obedient and silent whereas bad girls, who are strong and independent so Aliya seems and is considered to be a bad girl in eyes of society. From the character of Aliya, we find women's liberation and social and political emancipation. She goes with the flow of modernity that allows women to be independent and free. Aliya develops her identity and tries to be an equal citizen of society by proving that women are not weak and now the time has changed so they cannot continue to be objectified. Like other characters in the novel, her

psyche was not developed in a way that she is a girl, and a girl needs to be quiet and irrational. It can be observed on part of Saima, who was a cousin of Aliya that how her psyche was developed in a way that she needs to be traditional and follows patriarchal norms, maybe because Aliya's family have suffered and faced a lot of troubles in history so every character took that influence on their minds and react in the same way as they have observed meaning to be quite, suppressed and weak. As suggested by Postmodernism that nothing is fixed, transitions and shifts can be taken and years back marginalized women can now be in a center that is highly observed on part of Aliya. Aliya is depicted as a modern lady, she is represented as a new Pakistani woman who is and should be aware of her rights and made society value her existence, as now women are not a separate part of society who should be inferior. Changing is coming and accepted by society with time.

Conclusion

Novel *Salt and Saffron* is very effective in depicting and representing the old and new traditions, generations, women, and the world. As the name shows *Salt and Saffron* mean both are important and add different flavors to food similarly both stories of generations have their importance at their place. Women are struggling for their existence, honor, and freedom. They are under the influences of their emotional, cultural, and modern ins and outs. It represents the old generations from the character of the mother, father, and grandmother who never questions injustices and inequalities but then also remain loyal. Whereas the new generation is portrayed from the character of Mariam and Aliya who became the role model for the Dard e Dil family and society, they break the stereotypes and old traditions. In today's world means Postmodern time there are no limitations even no culture is static. South Asian countries like India and Pakistan are now adapting to these social and cultural changes. New trends and discourses are now replacing the old norms. Phenomena are deconstructing and then reconstructing. With Globalization, people have got aware to reject the logos of society meaning the logo-centric discourses now things and concepts can be decentralized. In Pakistani English literature, privileged roles are given to women in media and novels, there is a different and new representation of Pakistani women now and it is observed that patriarchal minds too are accepting this but few remains the same, who still believe in those socially constructed ideologies of masculine and feminine. Women are facing challenges and transforming themselves fastly. The male gender should support women to come out from those traditional fears and suppression and make them realize that now they are equal. With capitalism, the old cultural and social scenarios are changing. There are a lot of women who go out and financially support their whole

families. Few women completely reject the hegemony of males because of the shifting domains of power and control.

Kamila Shamsie is one of the creative female novelists concerning South Asia. Her characters are rebellious. *Salt and Saffron* is about maintaining balance in tradition and modernity. As she empowered herself, similarly she depicts in her novel characters that how now women's life is changed and burden-free from cultural history. The identity of the female is constituted in different contexts, situations, and settings. The novel touches on the theme of womanhood, meaning how initially she was subordinate to a man and now independent after struggling to achieve her identity. South Asian countries are fastly adapting to changes and accepting the hybridity of cultures. With capitalism and Globalization, many concepts and discourses are shifting and encouraged by society. Today a woman has realized their abilities and power by knowing themselves and trying to say no to forced marriages and domestic violence. They raise their voices on what is going wrong and against their rights. Keeping in mind the concept of deconstruction and perspectives of Postmodern feminism, things are decentralizing from logocentric discourses and phenomena. This study represents the two perspectives of women's identity, firstly from the eyes of the male (before Postmodern feminism) and then from the women's perspective (after Postmodern feminism). She is portrayed differently initially as an old woman who is oppressed and weak and then as a strong, rational, and independent woman. This study deconstructs the claims of superiority in terms of novels and also in general. Like in the novel Urdu word is used *Dard e Dil* meaning aches and pain in the heart which is faced by the royal family similarly all those suffering and troubles faced by eras back women in English literature and Pakistani cultural context. Aliya reaches successfully the destination of self-actualization and self-affirmation and self-confidence. It represents how modern women are like a modern world that accepts the challenges of society and proves their willpower. New trends have changed the old concepts now nothing is static. The ideology of masculine and feminine is a socially constructed phenomenon God has created every individual equally, no one is inferior and no one should be superior over another gender.

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