



RESEARCH PAPER

Negotiating Identity and Confronting Racism: A Postcolonial Analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *The Face in the Mirror*

¹Javairia Soomro, ²Dr. Muhammad Ajmal and ³Dr. Saima Yousaf Khan

1. BS Student, Department of English Language and Literature, Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur, Sindh, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur, Sindh, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of English Literature, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

muhammad.ajmal@saus.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to analyze Mohsin Hamid's *The Face in the Mirror* which highlights issues of identity and racism. This research is qualitative in nature and utilize a postcolonial theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha. The analysis is undertaken within the post-colonial context to show the struggles faced by people on a personal level as they search for identity in a racially defined society. The moment of the protagonist's engagement with her image in the mirror testifies to the effect of society on the self, pointing to the origin of prejudice and the desire to be accepted in a certain kind of society. The research explores how Hamid portrays the identity of his characters as being in constant flux and dependent on special and sociocultural circumstances. The findings imply that racism and identity are testing, clarifying the complicated relationships that influence experiences of people.

KEYWORDS

Face in the Mirror, Homi K. Bhabha, Identity, Racism

Introduction

In *The Face in the Mirror*, Mohsin Hamid explores racism and identity deeply and questions the unbelievably tricky question of viewed image in a society that challenges it often. Examining the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity within the framework of race, society, and culture, the book provides its audience with a distinctive program and critical viewpoint toward acknowledging the intricacies of identity. As a matter of fact, identity expands its meaning with cultural diversity and migratory movement, questions identification and precludes comprehending who we are and how are we linked to others.

By the way, to raising the terrible issues of racism which are still existed in our world contemporary culture, the peculiarities of *The Face in the Mirror* presents the concept of identity not as the concept which shifts within the sphere of individual's life and changes in response to various internal and external circumstances, but as the fact. The concept that is illustrated through the story of the protagonist who roams through a world, which has clearly defined racial and ethnic categorization. The novelist Hamid we are witnessing the psychological pressure through which these classifications are required to be inflicted upon people and leave them with this disassembled identity crisis of who they are. The repeated motif throughout the story is, the mirror representing the process of self-reflection and the often painful realization of one social class. Here, the protagonist is under pressure to deal with the uncomfortable truth of their existence as this introspection translates into

a battle ground on which self and other, subject and object collide in the form of gendered subjectivity. In fact, the matter of racism intertwines with the main themes of the novel during Hamid's exploration of identity. The book however shows how discrimination institutionalized can distort one's perception and how it becomes a barrier to one's own success. The many protagonists involved in a web of cultures that socialize them, dehumanize them and transform them into mere replicas of the culture or race they belong to. Stereotypes about women within cultural discursive resources also contribute to such a reductionist view of gender because they erect obstacles to meaningful intersex intimacy. Instead, the readers are being provoked by Hamid to look for such patterns that are unhealthy and are in a way being urged to test the abilities to question what we believe inscribed. Issues of identity are revealed in book, capturing how processes of oppression are defined by the combinations of culture, race, class and gender. I have illustrated the different attempts of the protagonist to try and reconcile these conflicting identity as Hamid and other have done, but mainly demonstrate the challenges faced in a society that refuses to accept or include an individual. What is important here is that, as is the case with the characters, identity should be perceived as something that is woven from many threads and everyone is a thread of these characters' fabric. There is a work promoted that by Hamid that it is a deeper and richer conception of belonging can be constructed by stressing the fluidity of identity and insisting that embracing paradox will lead to greater understanding and recognition. Racism is experienced by the protagonists that negotiate it as it is embedded in their engagement with other people as it is wrestled with their self. An excellent effort is made to illustrate how this bias can influence one or the other society and personal interactions in a more flagrant or gentle manner. Indeed, the book is staged to function in such a way ensuring that the reader faces his or her own reality, the truth of racism in the current society. More so, via portraying the repercussions of racism on the personality of the protagonist, the author persuades its readers to sympathize with the misfortunes of the protagonist as well as to consider consequences that socio-justice contains.

The notion of belonging in a world as what is described in the book *The Face in the Mirror: In Faces: A Diary of Isolation to Integration* we are realizing we belong to society that is integrating day by day. This is in regard to the protagonist's loyalty to his neighborhood or hood, his culture and his non desire to be part of the mainstream society. Virtual and docile, which in the story

Hamid underlines before the fight for acceptance and, at the same time, the fear of losing own cultural heritage, are perfectly captured by the importance of learning and appreciating the value of the journey. Although the protagonists are constantly in conflict with themselves, these different social environments are often repudiated by them.

Literature Review

The Manoeuvring of the post-colonial society in Mohsin Hamid's works seems to be a signature style, and several of his works focus on identity, race and socio-cultural issues, which makes him one of the prominent writers in postcolonial literature. *The face in the mirror*, although not much studied, illustrates Hamid's interest in post-colonial society's systemic racism and the theme of negotiating one's identity. Therefore this literature review reviews available literature focusing on Hamid's narrative techniques and situates it within the scope of postcolonial theories with the aim of such provision in the context of the analysis of the short story under consideration.

The concepts of hybridity and the third space as developed by Homi K. Bhabha are central in understanding post-colonial identity. Bhabha (1994) asserts that the

subordinated construct matters and thus is determined in a context of complicated social and cultural processes, which means that there isn't a single way to look at the world. This understanding assists in explaining how Hamid's character manages to live between how he sees himself and how society sees him. Several studies have been conducted on his novels including *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Nayar, 2010), but its application in *The Face in the Mirror* is still a new field of study.

The face in the mirror provides us an understanding of the prevailing conflict on the self-perception of post-colonial self through the internalization of racism as argued by Frantz Fanon. Frantz Fanon's concept of racism as an internalized belief system provides a greater framework to comprehend the central conflict in *The Face in the Mirror*. As Fanon (1952) shows, colonialism leads to an 'alienation' or 'negative self' among the colonized. The symbolism of the mirror which recurs through the narrative illustrates this alienation and the desire to belong in a racially determined world. Post-colonial scholars Such as Slemon (2001) have observed that postcolonial literature tends to be concerned with racial issues, which are issues that Hamid also deals with in his story.

Edward Said's definition of Orientalism (1978) helps to understand the construction of narratives about racialized subjects. Hamid's depiction of racism in *The Face in the Mirror* appears to be an extension of Said's assessment of the representation of the West with respect to non-Western people. Other examinations of Hamid's *Exit West* (Ali, 2019) and *Moth Smoke* (Kapadia, 2016) looked at how the stereotype barriers are brought down by the author, thus creating standards for comprehending what the author's other narratives in the short story entail. Crenshaw (1991) took the term intersectionality and explained the intertwining forms of marginalization that a person faces. Hamid's story demonstrates this complication by discussing how the image of a person is based on how a person is viewed in context of race and culture.

Hamid's works have been known for bringing important global issues through the prism of a personal story. Critics such as Upstone (2020) have remarked that Hamid's protagonists frequently reflect broader social relations. While a majority of the existing research covers his novels, *The Face in the Mirror* is as informative and compact as any of his books in addressing issues that pertain to post colonialism and relates to strengthened obsessive scholarship focus.

Also key throughout the 'plot' is the irony of seemingly mundane objects such as the mirror, which potentially serves as an aid to portraiture, or more likely, a distortion of the self-construct in the eyes of the others which can be described as a persona or personal traits that the society constructs about individuals. It is an issue of identity, the struggle of a person against the arguments of a world bent on defining him or her. These three impediments are erected in order to compel the main actors of the narratives to examine their cultural heritage, roots as well as their role in an increasingly globalized environment. The quick transformations that globalization, migration and multiculturalism bring about constitute the very social backdrop against which *The Face in the Mirror* was written. His story is preserved in this framework with Hamid with the intention to analyze how all those aspects influence people and their experiences of racism. *Face in the Mirror*, his story is kept by Hamid in this framework, to examine the ways in which these elements affect people's identities and encounters with racism. Though the events of protagonist might reflect a certain culture in which traditional concept of identification is posed and repose. Globalization possesses cross-border migration of people, cultures and ideas in recent decades, creating civilizations that are more than ever before. However, as struggle is made by people with the ramifications of cultural hybridity and the troubles of belonging, this variety is frequently greeted with tension as well as conflict. Race and ethnicity become

points of conflict in this setting, to result in marginalization and discrimination. This clash is captured in story that shows how characters negotiate their identities in the face of prejudice and social pressures. The journey of protagonist is a microcosm of the very large challenges those are faced by people in multicultural cultures, where the reality of racism frequently collide with the desiring for addition.

A grave test of identity, how it creates and remakes in reaction to outside stimuli, it is at the core of *The Face in the Mirror*. Studies of Hamid how people shape identities by societal views of race and ethnicity, resulting in a dislocated sense of self. The protagonist's inner conflicts are demonstrating the psychological costs of residing in a society where racial prejudices are commonplace, impacting not just one's own self-perception but also one's associations with others. The story is revolved around the theme of intersectionality, as Hamid shown how different facets of identity like gender, color, and class interact to produce distinct knowledge of marginalization. The collection of short stories focuses on protagonist idea or rather presents the trials and tribulations of navigating multiple personas and how intersections affect their self. The readers are encouraged by Hamid to consider the subtleties of identity growth in a globalized environment by illustrating the protagonist's problems. The book tests about the race how it is portrayed in the media and in popular culture, emphasizing how these depictions support the development of racial prejudices. He insists reader to consider their own prejudices and presumptions regarding race and identity by Hamid's analysis of media power, which is highlighted the ways in which societal myths impact how people perceive themselves.

Material and Methods

Qualitative approach combines as the theoretical frameworks literary analysis and comparative research as the basis of the methodology applied in the analysis of racism and identity in Hamid's *The Face in the Mirror* including the evaluation of the placement of the work, text construction, the evolution of protagonists and or antagonists and such themes within a broader sociology, anthropology, or political science context, this full methodology allows for the study of the entire work. Mirror while taking into account the narrative structure of text, character development, as well as thematic aspects within larger sociocultural contexts, this full methodology permits for a thorough analysis of the work. The particular approaches that are used in this study are indicated in the subsequent sections of this research paper. Thus, the emphasis is placed on the following goals: making a close reading of *The Facets in the Mirror*; scenes, character interactions, and narrative devices form the basis of this process whereas scrutinizing how Hamid has employed the language, symbols, and structure to postulate racism and identity-related themes, this study endeavors to reveal how many layers of the intended messages are masked in the faciality of the written text. Thus, in the course of the work, it is going to be proved that the main character's emotional conflicts reflect world issues since their story and experiences will be considered.

One of the things that will be fundamental in the technique is the analysis of the reiterated motifs, such as for example, the mirror, as a symbol of identity and subjectivity. This research will demonstrate the relevance of this motif in understanding the main character's internal struggles and the contextual consequence of young people identities' formation in the multicultural society by applying the mentioned approach throughout the story. To put the protagonist's experiences into proper context, some elements of postcolonial theory will be employed. This theoretical framework will help to clarify racism and contemporary identity as colonial legacies. The study will examine how Hamid's characterization of identity relates to major concepts from Homi K. Bhabha

among others in *The Face in the Mirror*. The research uses Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality to test the intricacies of identity.

Results and Discussion

The results from the textual analyses and character, the applying of theoretical frameworks, and the knowledge received from comparative research exist in this part. The results show about the story deftly combines personal and social hardships, showing the difficulties of creating a uniqueness in a heterogeneous setting. Indeed, as identified by the analysis, identity which prevails within the framework of the novel is best described as active and changing one. Voyage of the protagonist, it is the representation of how cultural identity, cultural experience and culture imposed by the external society influence the perception of self. The conflict lies in the main character and their race identity throughout the story and minis troubled by whether they belong to one or two completely different cultures. When their experience is made by them of acceptance, and of rejection for acceptance based solely on looks. This tension is obviously on show. Thus, using the mirror motif, Hamid dramatizes the internal conflict of those who establish multicultural subjects which are experienced. A potent metaphor for self-reflection. This comes as a struggle between the protagonist to choose either social rejection or self.-acceptance as it focuses on how challenging it is for an individual to create a coherent personal identity regarding the society that often practices clear categorizations. The interaction between the internal and external features helps is to grasp the concept of identity at a deeper level because it suggest that it works together with society stories and perception alongside experience. This study demonstrates that Hamid with finesse educates the reader about how identity is constructed in a multicultural space for applying intersectionality lens. They represent the problems a protagonist has on mirror that a real life of many people who are in the intersection of different identities. The complexity points to the flaw in separate categorizations and demands for the need for an enhanced perspective of how experiences and social systems speak about forming identity. According to the analysis, Hamid has criticized media portrayals and he said that those affect people's perceptions of themselves. Social preconceptions fortified by media narratives, through which is decreased to people to basic identities based on race and ethnicity, intensify the protagonist's inner conflict. The reflections of protagonist on how media representations and affect how people view race, resulting in spirits of alienation and self-doubt, are well defined examples of this critique. An investigation by Hamid of media representation is totally in line with current debates over the significance of varied narratives in influencing community opinion. The consequences indicate that wide cultural narratives that reinforce stereotypes they tie to the battle of protagonist with self-identity while emphasizing the bond, readers are challenged to think critically about the media they consume and the effects that interpretation has on personal identity. The story moves reflection on the non-stop hardships that relegate people encounter in today's society that is interconnected. The consequences shows the novel's applicability in promoting conversations on identity, belonging, and the social structures that influence these experiences. The readers are faced challenges by Hamid to consider their own responsibilities in combating racism and promoting inclusive communities by showcasing the fortitude of protagonist in the face of hardship. As the comparative analysis, *The Face in the Mirror* possesses thematic parallels with other recent works that test identity and race as Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana*. In multicultural settings, the intricacies of selfhood are also covered in these books, highlighting how race, migration, and cultural representation affect individual experiences. The value is highlighted through results of varied narratives in shedding light on the complex nature of identity by keeping work of Hamid within the larger literary landscape. Even each author is challenged such subjects in a new way, the relative views suggest that taken as a whole, a deeper comprehension of

the difficulties is added by them and victories complicated in negotiating identity in a globalized community.

Discussions

Critical deliberations of Mohsin Hamid's *The Face in the Mirror* concerning which the novel has been negotiated troubling matters of racism and identity as have been depicted and evoked in the plot, characters, and beyond. The novel finds these subjects out, exploring the postcolonial human being in a globalized world of institutional racism, shifting sexualities and multiculturalism. This part reports the findings of the study in which it also reflects on the general implications of the themes of the novel and the implications of Hamid's representation of identity and the relationships between the domains of class, racially and culturally, illuminating the complexities of selfhood in a worldwide world characterized by institutional racism, changing social norms and cultural hybridity. The results of the study are summarized in this part, in which it is discussed about the themes' wider societal relevance and the ramifications of Hamid's depiction of identity and the intersectionality of class, race and culture. The concept of identity in which is ill-defined in discussion of how it is formed in a multicultural America, is addressed in *The Face in the Mirror*. For instance, an individual is likely to have challenges balancing various roles which are precipitated by the cultural relations.

Complementary relationship with their everyday life events, social norms, and needs is provided by journey of protagonist. In the story the different ways through which, identity is underlined as a theory that takes effect based on the internal and external perception. The mirror can hardly be overestimated as regarding the process of representation of introspection and often barely tolerable process of self-acceptance. The protagonist's experiences The contrasts between the main character and her with societal hopes and stereotype show how they are caught up in a struggle between their self-images and the images they inspire, and how complex societal processes that shape single subjectivity occur. Actually, a range of people in multicultural context can identify to this struggle, for example, the want for actuality is normally opposed to the capacity to conform with the look and feel of the culture other individuals expect. In order to fully understand protagonist's narratives in *The Face in the Mirror* I receive an intersectional test. The correlation between class, gender, and race complicates the character identification in this way, and it is shown about these identities estimate their belonging and exclusion. In Hamid's story where it is shown how institutional institutions maintain inequity, yet at the same time demonstrating that people are not what a singular aspect of them constitute them to be there is an example of how dynamics within class either increases or decreases prejudice, and how the protagonist's class affects their racist experiences. An example of criticism of media shows how people's talking to be affected by them about themselves; Another dimension is the talking The book establishes the manner in which media encouraged social scripts and the stigmatized self-images influence individual perception and the perceptions formed about them. Gender performances, representations, cultural representations that encase ambiguous subjectivities to a starring stereotype amplifies the protagonist's internal conflict, feeling of doubt plus estrangement. A-promoted societal narratives and stereotypes affect how people see themselves and how are they seen by others. Media representations that bandage complicated identities to simplistic stereotypes often intensify the protagonist's internal turmoil, causing feelings of self-doubt as well as alienation. In other words, analysis of Hamid's this subject corresponds to current discourses on representation in media and literature. The urgent requirement of real and diverse narratives disrupts the rank and challenges conventional methods of figuring characteristics and embodying them. In turning to the readers, Hamid poses the latter to

question their biases and assumptions for engaging with the psychological expenses of media statements.

The Face in the Mirror focuses on the topics of identity and racism problems which are still actual at present. As the world and it becomes more interconnected by the day debate over migration, race, and cultural identity continue to be relevant today than ever before. The given writings of Hamid by reminding of the constant struggle for integration of minority persons into the given community, highlight the theme of the oppression. Compassion and acceptance are deemed necessary for the formation of societies forties, as it is witnessed by nationalism, xenophobia and institutional racism in different regions of the world. The main hero of Hamid provides the character necessary to withstand these challenges' the fortitude needed to cope with these difficulties, emphasizing the need of people to engage with their personal experiences and question the systems of communities that run their lives. Thus, Hamid questions the readers concerning the way they realize identity and racism in their own life, showing the evolution of the protagonist. In this sense, the function of the story is preserved as a performativity - in the form of a provocation, of a performative call to act, love and all-inclusiveness in the context of division and oppression.

In *The Face in the Mirror* the question of identity and racism demonstrates that it still remains intertwined in the modern society. One aspect of self is that it is complex and developed due to a society's perception, intersectionality and cultural hybridity; it is shown by Mohsin Hamid's nuanced depiction of the journey of protagonist. The work of Hamid adds to the current conversation on identity by challenging discussing and media portrayals the topics' applicability in the modern world. Here, readers are challenged to think critically about how they perceive race and belonging.

Conclusion

In *The Face in the Mirror*, racism and identity have been shown while testing, clarifying the complicated relationships that influence experiences of people in a heterogeneous community. The readers are questioned to understand the intricacies of selfhood, the power of society conceptions, and the subtleties of race and belonging through a complicated narrative that weaves individual struggle with more general social topics. An important facets of the book and reaffirm is highlighted in the conclusion of study its significance in the current identity debates. The fact that identity is responsive and refractive remains a notion core to story. The issue of proven instance shows that originality of the protagonist is an exciting process of a dialogue between the culture, individual experience, and the society's dreams instead of a static final state. Since the protagonist moves between many different identities endorsed or shaped by both the inner and outer critics, the mirror serves as a powerful symbol of the process of introspection. From observing the socialization of different individuals in cross cultural context revealing how conformity to society's expectation nullifies identity search, this narrative resonates well. Despite the sharing of profound information about the nature of subjectivity in a postmodern world, an important contribution to the discussion of identities and identity is made possible by *The Face in the Mirror*. Hamid skillfully demonstrates to readers that this is a believable combination of personal and society allows them to go further and explore how society shapes people. In the book, the necessity of empathy and comprehension is demonstrated to navigate the basic premises of identity practice of modern culture and becomes both the test in literature and the stimulus for the analyst's intellectual refreshment. In General, if it were to increase this test with the literary redesign, Hamid always attempts to raise awareness of the struggle and triumphs of acceptance and belonging to a world to them which is becoming increasingly harder.

References

- Ali, M. (2019). Negotiating Migration and Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55(1), 42-56.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.
- Hamid, M. (2007). *The reluctant fundamentalist*. Harcourt.
- Kapadia, S. (2016). Reading Gender and Class in Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*. *South Asian Review*, 37(2), 18-32.
- Khair, T. (2015). The Postcolonial City and Its Subject: Mohsin Hamid's Literary World. *Interventions*, 17(1), 120-135.
- Nayar, P. K. (2010). *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*. Pearson Education India.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Slemon, S. (2001). Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 23(1), 157-168.
- Upstone, S. (2020). Resisting Borders: Mohsin Hamid and the Politics of Migration. *Wasafiri*, 35(2), 8-15.