



RESEARCH PAPER

Deconstructing the Image of Third World Woman in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West: A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective*

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ABSTRACT

Pakistani writers, particularly Mohsin Hamid, have long highlighted women's struggle and their predicament under patriarchy in order to deconstruct their image as third-world women who remain passive against social and political injustices. Through the lens of postcolonial feminism as espoused in the classical postcolonial feminist works, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" and "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" written by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (1985) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) respectively, this study intends to explore how female characters in Hamid's novel, *Exit West* question and deconstruct patriarchal and colonial values which subdued them in the name of societal or western enlightened norms. These articles are used to explain the novel in the context of postcolonialism in general and postcolonial feminism in particular to investigate gendered roles and women's resistance to patriarchal forms of gender violence and oppression. The study's outcome revealed that colonialism and patriarchy impose gendered roles on women to deprive them of agency and problematise their identity formation processes and independent thinking.

KEYWORDS

Gendered Roles, Patriarchy, Postcolonial Feminism, Resistance, Third-World Woman

Introduction

Safety Postcolonial refers to the ongoing struggle between colonial authority and its ideologies, which continue to impact many cultures, particularly countries whose rebellions have shattered formal connections with their colonial rulers (Iqbal, 2021). It is also concerned with colonized peoples' creation of writings that constitute their recognition and reclaim their forgotten history (Parker, 2019). The postcolonial feminist study understands women's image in the post-structural world where they undergo double colonization. Females in post-colonial countries are subjected to double colonization and victimized by colonialism and patriarchy. According to Mohanty (1994), Western feminists misrepresent their colonial counterparts by keeping them silent about their ethnic, cultural, social and constitutional disparities. They oppressed colonial women by imposing white feminist models on them.

Spivak (1985) talks about how western cultures explore other cultures. The primary significance of this article, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" is in its first part, where she talks about the moral dilemmas involved with utilizing universal concepts and frameworks when researching another culture. Her article's central allegation is that western theoretical thought is produced to encourage western monetary benefits. She thinks that information is never objective and always reflects the makers' objectives. Mohanty (1984) contends that western women's activist

thinking has diminished all non-western women to the array of aggregate others. In "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty investigates how western discourse on feminism results in constructing the third-world woman as a homogenous class of backward people waiting for western women to safeguard their interests and speak for them. Her examination shows that western women's liberation has a propensity for regarding third-world women as the undiversified group of women and essentially the same.

Literature Review

For colonial and postcolonial writers, the relationship between colonized and colonizer has always piqued their interest. According to Ashcroft et al (2002), the former retained power over the latter in the political, social, and imaginative domains. Western writers' works have aided in consolidating this influence over the East. According to Edward W. Said (1978), Europe's culture obtains force, power, and uniformity by pitting itself against the orient. Young's (2002) view about postcolonialism is that it is not a theory but a set of ideas, including feminism and socialism and he believes that some nations fight the imperialists, like Iran, against America, but they do that in peril.

Mohsin Hamid is a well-known Pakistani English novelist who has received international recognition for his expressive writing. He paints a picture of Pakistani culture that includes issues such as identity problems, global conflict, terrorism, and binary male-female relationships that provide new insights into the flexibility and unpredictability of their traditional roles. His novel, *Exit West* tests the development of manliness, relocation, and misfortune apparent between one's learned orientation and their questioning of fundamental factors. Throughout the novel, Nadia and Saeed confronted and handled their things in their emergency and unfamiliar objections. So, *Exit West* is not exclusively a traveller's story but a post-pilgrim women's activist transient story. This study plans to add to the portrayals of the traveller female's stories as referenced earlier.

Material and Methods

This research uses a qualitative research method as the study is based on the textual analysis of the novel using the theory of postcolonial feminism as discussed in Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" and Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" as a framework. The researchers analyse the selected novel to explore the issues that Asian women are facing in a globalisation period in western society. *Exit West* and the articles mentioned above are the primary texts for this research. Ashcroft et al (2002) have shown various thematic connections that connect postcolonial works of literature around the globe and the most prominent among them is creating a difference from the imperial metropolitan centre. All of the colonizers' fears are encapsulated in *Exit West* as colonial discourse carries the seeds of its own instability from within, due to the presence of ambivalence, which is the process of repulsion and attraction toward a thing simultaneously (Iqbal and Rehan, 2020). Similarly, in a postcolonial position, the battle for freedom is a binding motif. The data is interpreted using a textual analysis technique to explore the gendered roles assigned to women in a patriarchal society that restricts their freedom and find answers to the proposed question, what are various patriarchal norms that restrict the freedom of women in *Exit West*?

Textual Analysis: Representation of Gendered Roles in *Exit West*

We see Nadia, the protagonist of the novel and other females in Hamid's novel, *Exit West*, marginalized just like subalterns. In *Exit West*, her mother and sister didn't

say anything, and her father did his responsibility as a man to keep them quiet. Although their home was free of physical violence, she announced her family's utter terrible matters after completing her university degree (p.16). I argue that Nadia's talk on her terrible family matters reveals that patriarchal responsibilities imposed on females against their gendered roles make them subalterns who cannot speak for themselves. Hamid's novel is based on emigration and refugee problems. Everyone, especially Nadia and Saeed, moves from different magical doors to save themselves from the violence that becomes part of their lives (p.12). In *Exit West*, women suffer double marginalization, for example, a stray bullet killed Saeed's mother (p.43). We know that gender is about choosing between femineity and masculinity as personality does not have a settled status. It is unendingly made and reproduced. The continuous audit focuses on tracking changes in women's sexual and leadership roles and their speech patterns with the help of Butler's postmodern women's dissident theory, which admits that direction and language are performative acts.

Pakistani culture is undergoing a social revolution about feminine change, perfection, a re-evaluation of sexuality, and language use. The data assessment assumes that Pakistani women are changing how they behave, what they do for a living and even how they speak. There is progress, perfection, and social shift through the imperative female legend. This research enthusiastically suggests that future researchers may investigate different areas such as language, sexuality, and direction in Pakistani novels. The interaction between these constituents reshapes the roles and personalities of Pakistani women and their social retraction. Engaged by expanding mindfulness and portability acquired through worldwide interconnectivity, women in Pakistan are progressively opposing male-controlled society and inciting a re-normalization of the nearby discernments regarding orientation and sexuality and similar has been projected in the novel.

In the novel, we can identify several ways according to the postcolonial feminist perspective. Chapter 9 of the novel makes a strong case for the postcolonial theory as a starting point. In this situation, both protagonists are "in those hotter parts of the year, in one of the worker places caps on his head, toiling away" (p.111). It happens in London, England, a country that has colonized a major part of the globe. However, it is undeniably connected to postcolonialism that they drive emigrants to perform labour for them. It is said that "in swapping for their workforce for scouring landscape and erection infrastructure and mustering residence from prefabricated lumps, migrants were granted forty meters and a pipe: a home on forty square meters of land and an interrelation to all the utilities of modernity" (p.111). It may be an allusion to the commitment made to freedmen in 1865 in America as part of the Unification's cultural reform gesture. Throughout the entire story, there is another feminist theory that displays Nadia's character and her relationship and that story is equally crucial for Saeed. Saeed and Nadia's relationship fizzles out in chapter 10 of the novel as they acknowledge their attraction to other people rather than one another. The following lines from the novel demonstrate their relationship,

Saeed and Nadia were devoted, and whatever name they gave their coalition, they believed it entailed them safeguarding the other. So, neither talked much of meandering apart, not wanting to impose an agitation of a jilting, while also quietly feeling that panic, the fear of severing their tie. At the end of the world, they had built together a world of shared experiences that no one else would share. A shared bosom language was unique to them, and a sense that what they might break was special and likely unparalleled. (p.131)

It demonstrates how healthy of a connection the two have but still, they desired the best for the other even if they were moving apart. Saeed revered Nadia and did not think of him as lower than him. So, the postcolonial woman is raising her voice and making a decision as she desires using her rational faculty in an unprecedented way.

At the outset, we will commonly square measure familiar with the depicted Nadia's personality as a young girl who was garbed from the statistics of her toes to an unparalleled low of her jugular score during a streaming drab robe. Her supernatural or racial association is only from time to time known inside the story. We can battle that Hamid implies her dim robe considering the face cover or the garment, a significant outfit threadbare by a Muslim lady. In *Exit West*, the figure of Nadia's dull company acts as an illustration of its various depictions and highlights her cross-breed character inside the strategy. By far most, by and large, essentially inside the western world, ladies who wear these significant robes square measure stereotyped as stacked ladies who square measure never-endingly concerning the work (p.378). Hitched woman battles that this strong supposition, which connects the robes to the idea of women being abused or used for convenience, is accompanied by the conviction that other choice or office is missing as for the ones who regard even more incredibly wearing the piece of clothing (p.378). But ladies who wear dull outfits square measure clearly as thoroughly in general to the coordinates of their social orders and customs (p.386). In the novel, these speculations are mainly incontestable and maintained through Saeed's persona and viewpoint on Nadia. It is a significant part of the story that is revealed early inside their secret discussions in the novel. This also shows how eastern women are stereotypically thought of in western societies and how a patriarchal mindset person judges a woman based on the clothes design that she wears.

As the language makes clear, Saeed has preconceived ideas about Nadia at this time based on the attire she is wearing. His exercises and words focus on the ordinary speculation concerning ladies who wear dull outfits as moderate and conservative. His aversion to spreading the word by his momentary pause revealed this speculation. Furthermore, Saeed anticipates that he might be unique in Nadia's instruction to wear her attire. His seductive smile and conviction that he can always defend himself to her. Saeed acknowledges that Nadia is passionately non-normal, he likewise endeavours to gift himself as correspondingly non-common and maintain his suspicions. Saeed endeavours to keep up with his pietism to Nadia. The remainder of their hidden oral correspondence and Nadia's exercises uncovers that Nadia rushes to rib these speculations that Saeed relates alongside her dull outfit. However, Saeed continues to try to account for himself, when she says that she does not pay attention to such considerations. But using direct speech that she doesn't supplicate; she disputes the generalization that conveying the dark outfit rigorously mirrors the way of life or confidence of the woman wearing it. Through her watchful eye towards Saeed, she utilizes her eyes as areas of strength to contest his current suspicion. Accordingly, through her underlying connection with Saeed, Nadia features the prospect that the attached and prevailing impression of the dark outfit that doesn't make a difference to the conditions in which it's contributed with diverse implications.

In a scene in the novel, the first vignette features a fair-skinned woman asleep without setting the alarm. Thus, a dark-skinned man with a black door enters her apartment. The fair-skinned woman stands in for the middle class in the west who sees immigrants as a threat to their way of life, livelihoods, and nation. In comparison, the dark-skinned man represents the third world, whose inhabitants barely survive. He makes an effort to move wisely and moves as though his neck is bound and this demonstrates the caution with which migrants go to the west and the difficulties they

encounter in their homeland. Another scene shows the locals' hostility against immigrants and their aggressive behaviour as the Japanese man follows the Philippian females who have just come out of a black door. Saeed and Nadia's escape from their city via one of the numerous enigmatic portals that carry people everywhere in *Exit West* is the most overt example of the concept of escape in the novel and postcolonial peoples' unsettling issues in the west. These characters can flee their life in other ways as well, though. In truth, Hamid highlights a few more modest means of escape that Saeed and Nadia employ to form their regular lives, using technology or recreational drugs so that they can put the migrancy burden away.

Nadia and Saeed use their phones to access an invisible world, all around them and nowhere, taking them to far-off and close-by locations. Naturally, this has a special significance because they exist in a society where Governmental agencies and violent radicals both seek to limit their ability to cross borders. This novel investigates the various escape options accessible to those who must steer clear of danger, unhappiness, or both. It is a book about limits and travel, demonstrating how people use commonplace distractions – small escapes – to amuse themselves.

Nadia and Saeed can access other regions of the world using the internet on their phones, even in a place where violence is rampant. It is a beautiful gift for Saeed, but it also carries a potentially dangerous force he wishes to keep in check: "Saeed partly resisted the pull of his phone. He found the antenna too powerful, the magic it summoned too mesmerizing. As though he were eating a banquet of limitless food, stuffing himself, stuffing himself, until Saeed felt dizzy and sick, he had removed or hidden or restricted all but a few applications" (p.31). Weary of the magic, his phone possessed the capacity to carry him into other realms without letting him stay there. He restricts his daily internet usage to one hour. This restriction implies that Saeed doesn't want to be completely cut off from his life, even though he is okay with temporary diversions. He eventually enjoys his own life, so he wants to stay in the present and avoid becoming overly engrossed in parallel realities.

Saeed and Nadia use a variety of distractions to get away from their daily routines. In reality, the couple's recreational drug usage allows them to divert their attention from the chaos and violence around them. When she and Saeed are hanging out, Nadia frequently requests that we roll joints since she loves to smoke marijuana. Naturally, it comes as little surprise that Nadia is more enthusiastic about drugs than Saeed is and this is ultimately consistent with her tendency to use the internet rapaciously and carelessly. But Saeed also likes to use drugs as he discovered when he tried mushrooms in Nadia's apartment. The calming but revelatory effects of the mushrooms give him a new form of escape that involves redefining his relationship with the world more than it does floating away from his immediate surroundings. He observes Nadia's lemon tree and thinks about how perfectly interconnected everything is, "Surely conflicts could be healed if others had experiences like this" (p.36). He suddenly acquires a fresh perspective on his situation due to thinking about connection, gratitude and peace which finally renews his faith in others. This way, recreational drugs allow him to get away and view his circumstances objectively to return with a fresh perspective.

One of the various implications Nadia shows along with her dark outfit all through her gathering with Saeed is that the young lady who wears the dark outfit attempts to express her chance and association. She is heavily loaded with connotations that contradict the way her dark clothing appears on the outside simply because she rides a bike. Most importantly, it includes Nadia's office and autonomous disposition.

In media and composing, ladies are commonly imagined as basic aft-guest plan voyagers. With this portrayal, ladies' honesty is allegorically envisioned as those unable or unwilling to exercise self-control. This familial disharmony prompts Nadia to go to check without assistance from any other individual. Her skin becomes repulsed by this action that it cannot see. At that moment, the two protagonists get to know one another and develop a point-by-point relationship that eventually turns into love. Saeed ordinarily slips into Nadia's level, covered in her light robes.

As their violence increases, Saeed's mother is shot and murdered by a stray gunman, causing local floods and making routine timetables more challenging to examine. Nadia relocates to Saeed's house. The two legends begin to focus on pieces of tattle about entrances that are the door to absolutely different components of the globe, and they intend on leaving their town through one such doorway. This specific availability of wizard vividness erases the genuine shocks of fleeting travel, focusing instead on its own mental effects on our legends. They finally arrive at Mykonos's coastline, shoemaking along with the requirements for living till a Greek youth whom Nadia becomes acquainted with locates them in a doorway that conveys them to London. In London, alongside a couple of novel homeless people, they hunch down in a truly massive house, and the strain begins to create between them. In a fundamental to direct this break, they push ahead to the American state.

Throughout this flight, the original gives a particular setting to all legends. Consequently, they scrutinize to grapple with covering direction occupations and subsequently the conceivable outcomes that enlarge after they are crossed. The capability, in any case, Nadia and Saeed's dominance in each nation and their cycle makes a complex picture of direction may be each dyspnoea and a store and excess. Each character goes against and confronts the character's requirements. Nadia imposed herself by acting as she wished, and Saeed by enforcing the limitations of manhood and caring for his help and ingenuity and such critical times will certifiably work toward isolating and researching social doubts.

In this novel, every gender feels the refugee crisis at the very start of the book and throughout the story. Their life turned full of miseries due to being colonized. A nameless city overrun with refugees exemplifies an appeal to everyone's conditions. Life is somewhat peaceful, and things are under control; however, it becomes problematic for survival, and the life of the ordinary person suffers due to war created by global forces and extremist Islamic fundamentalists (p. 10). Saeed also observes a hawk constructing a nest. As the hawk represents protection and a clear vision, it means the start of his relationship with Nadia and their possible union here again.

Conclusion

Through this study, we can say that though all immigrants suffer horrible fates due to the ongoing racial, social and cultural clashes in world politics yet male characters impose gendered roles upon females so patriarchy continues to dominate in the area of moral regulatory standards. But at the same time, widespread and unavoidable western cultural and technical forces regularly undermine and threaten patriarchy. *Exit West* flips patriarchal gender roles on their heads and reconstructs them. It has been found that Hamid's female protagonist challenges the stereotypical image of the Muslim woman through her courage, sexual identity, and liberated perspectives on the world at large. Hence, Nadia is a ferocious sensualist who lives independently despite the fact that she faces hardships and wears a black robe to hide her identity.

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