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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH LANGUAGE IN MOHSIN HAMID'S MOTH SMOKE

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Scripts, And Teamwork.

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to explore the profound role played by language in the process of identity construction within the context of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*. It unfolds the complex ways in which linguistic choices shape and construct the characters' personal and societal identities. Identity is a dynamic concept, dealing with the social-positioning of individuals and others. The paper examines how the characters in the novel use language to establish social hierarchies, employing specific words and expressions to assert their identities. As for theoretical framework, the paper uses dramaturgy theory offered by Goffman in 1959. The major tenets of the theory – presentation of self, audience segregation, team work use of props and social scripts - are examined through analysis of selected excerpts from the novel. The paper ends with suggestion that language affects characters' identities, influencing how they understand each other and creating boundaries between them.

INTRODUCTION

Moth Smoke (2000) is Mohsin Hamid's debut novel. Undoubtedly, the novel has got global applause due to its distinguishing themes of identity and power. It has been honoured with the Betty Trask Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Book

Award. Shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South-Asian Literature, it has become a seminal work in the post-colonial literature due to its author's talented vision. Though Eubank et al.(2021) consider identity a fluid concept ,Sawatsky and Monrouxe (2023) encourage researchers and educators - doing professional identity framework - to engage with its rich theoretical tradition. It has been generally observed that language is employed in literary works to shape and express individual identities. It is language which becomes a powerful vehicle of power and control in shaping the identities of the marginalized segments in society.

As for the context of post-colonial literature, identity construction via language has attracted many scholars. Moth Smoke offers a vast venue for the exploration of identity construction as it emphasizes the ways in which the characters in the novel shape, construct and shift their own identities. The study plunges into theme of identities construction regarding the language use in the novel. It is based on a sociolinguistic frame work so that the representation of identity construction may be analyzed.

RESEARCH GAP

While the theme of identity construction through the use of language has been investigated in several works in literature, there is still a need for further research on it regarding contemporary Pakistani fictions. Few studies have focused on the construction of identity in Moth Smoke. More in-depth analysis is needed in order to explore the ways in which language is employed in shaping identities. The research paper will address this gap by analyzing how language is used in constructing identity.

Significance of the Study

While offering an in-depth analysis of theme of identity construction via language, the study will provide valuable contribution to the shaping of identity in the globalized world. The study will underscore the ways in which language becomes a powerful vehicle to demonstrate the intricacies of power struggles.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

What follows are the major objectives of the study:

1. To explore the ways in which language is used to construct identity in Moth Smoke.
2. To examine the ways in which language is used to a powerful vehicle of dominant discourses and cultural norms in the novel.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do the characters in Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke use language in shaping and constructing their identities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity is what we project into the world and how we desire to be perceived by others (Vizuette, 2022). Language and identity are two distinct and inextricably

interwined concepts (Nayamekye et al., 2023). Identity is concerned with specific acts and stances which are shaped by specific linguistic choices. Identity remains dynamic, constantly changing which various interactions. Identity construction is inter-subjective and reciprocal. It is worth-noticing that the construction of an individual's identity also constructs the identity of others (He, 2004). Following the assumptions made by Wodak (2005), based on her previous research on identity:

- Identities are always re/created in specific contexts. They are 'co-constructed' in interactive relationships. They are usually fragmented, dynamic and changeable – everyone has multiple identities.
- Identity construction always implies inclusionary and exclusionary processes, i.e. the definition of ONESELF and OTHERS.
- Identities that are individual and collective, national and transnational are also re/produced and manifested symbolically.
(Wodak, 2015 : 216)

Identity is shaped by individuals' relationships with themselves and others within a social context. Identity is generally regarded as an intricate concept influenced by upbringing and society. It means that identity is constructed through interaction of individuals with other people around them, contributing to how the individuals perceive themselves and how others perceive these individuals.

Dooly (2017) has suggested that the construction of online identities enhances agentive and performative perspectives in teaching and learning practices. Globalization has extended the sphere of social interactions by making intercultural encounters easier (Karhunen et al., 2023). Norton (2013) is of the view that when language learners speak they not only exchange information but also reorganize a sense of who they are and how they relate to world. Gibson (2004) opines that language is the control feature of human identity. Even language becomes powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity (Spolsky, 1999). In their study Kokesh and Sternadori (2005) find that young adult fiction reflects an increasing ambivalence among girls and women about constructing their gender identities.

Identity and linguistic choices are inseparable. The words individual choose, the way they speak and the language they use mirror their identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to analyze the ways of identity construction in *Moth Smoke* the dramaturgy theory is used as a valuable theoretical framework. It is presented by Goffman in 1959. The theory examines social interaction like theatrical performance. Individuals are seen actively presenting themselves to others in assuming different roles. What follows are major tenets of dramaturgy theory:

1. Presentation of Self: Goffman's theory posits that in presentation of themselves individuals have front-stage selves and back-stage selves. The front

stage is concerned with the performance and presentation of oneself to others. As for the back-stage, the private realm of individuals is explored where they drop their outer image.

2. Use of Props: In dramaturgy theory, props refer to the physical objects or items which are used by individuals in order to create a desired impression. These props give authenticity to the portrayal of particular role and identity.

3. Teamwork: Though dramaturgy theory emphasizes on individual performance, it maintains that individuals often work together in order to do collective performances, regarding the construction of overall social reality. The goal may be achieved. Individuals are seen as active participants, showing togetherness.

4. Social Scripts: These scripts refer to the set of expectations for behaviors that individuals follow in various social settings. Those scripts are a blueprint, dictating the individuals have to act, behave, speak and respond regarding given social setting.

5. Audience Segregation: The dramaturgy theory also refers to the practice of presenting oneself differently to different audiences. While doing so, individuals shape their image and utilize this interaction with different audiences in different situations. Individuals deftly adapt their identities and performances in order to achieve specific goals in their interactions with others.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Presentation of Self

Front stage behavior refers to the behavior individuals display when they are in the presence of audience. As for Daru, he as a banker sticks to his professional role. He follows the rules and protocols of banking interacting with clients in a respectful manner. Following is the extract showing his meeting with Malik Jawan.

'You are late', he says,
I'am in no mind for this 'Sorry, Mr. Jiwan, my car _____
'Never mind. Has my cheque cleared'
'Your cheque!'
He strikes his beard and looks at me, saying nothing.
I remember myself why God gave bankers lips to kiss up to our client.

As for social gathering, Daru presents a front stage persona, aligning with the expectations of the elite. He does polite conversation, dresses properly and displays the appropriate etiquettes to fit in the elite circles. When Ozi's guests have gone, Daru, Mumtaz and Ozi are there.

'So, what's the plan I asks. 'Pickles's cousin is having a party at his farm house.'
'Ozi says you have to come.'
'I'm not invited, I say, And don't have a date.'

'Will get you in' Ozi says, clapping my shoulder. 'Never fear, year: I'm back in town.'

In the above extract Daru hesitates to attend the party he is not invited to. It shows the appropriate etiquettes of Daru.

Now let's see the backstage of Daru. It is Daru who indulges in drug use, smokes hashish. He does all this when he is away from the public eye, in the privacy of his own home or with Murad Badsha. He busies himself with romantic encounters with Mumtaz the wife of his best friend. The difference between Mumtaz and Daru is that

Mumtaz was over-air-conditioned and longed to be uncooled, while Darashkoh was under air-conditioned and longed be cooled. Although they walked the same path for a while Mumtaz and Darashkoh were headed in opposite direction.

The difference between Mumtaz and Daru is deftly described in the metaphor of air-conditioning.

As for Mumtaz on the front stage, she has a socialite image. She attends high-profile parties dressing herself impeccably and showing poised demeanor. On the backstage Mumtaz enjoys extra-marital relationship with Daru as she says: Since he was of Ozi's best friend I knew hid keep his mouth shut. We had a delicious courtship, slow and exquisite..... declaring my independence for the United State marriage.

Use of Props

Aurangzeb owns pajero which becomes a significant prop in Moth Smoke. It represents Aurangzeb's aspirations for success, social mobility and the pursuit of luxurious life style. As Daru remarks

I sit in the back of Ozi's Pajero I've never been in a Pajero before. Costs more than my house and moves like a bull, powerful and single-minded Ozi drives by pointing it one direction and stepping on the gas trusting that everyone will get out of our way.

The above extract shows that Pajero becomes a symbol of richness and power while moving "like a bull, powerful and single-minded". Like a ruler, ruling a vast kingdom, Ozi thinks that "everyone will get out of our way". Later on, Daru remarks, that "the police don't stop us on our drive hence. We are in a Pajero at all." It reveals that even a policeman has no courage to stop a Pajero knowing the authority of the persons sitting in it.

Again Daru finds Pajero with Aurangzeb watching it, at home.

The red Pajero is parked in the drive way, Ozi watching a servant wiping the dent in its bumper with a wet cloth. My best friend is wearing sunglasses a bright

T-shirt and knee-length shorts. He looks like an overgrown child. A child who gets everything. Gets away with everything.

In the above extract the props include Pajero, sunglasses, a bright T-shirt and knee – length shorts. All these objects demonstrate the wealth Ozi owns.

Aurangzeb loved ACs with a passion unrivaled by his love for any other species of inanimate object. He was never happier than when his bedroom was so cold that he needed a heavy blanket to avoid shivering in the middle of summer. Aurangzeb, more than most man, sought to master his environment.

The above extract demonstrates that Aurangzeb is obsessed with air-conditioners. It is AC which draws a line between the upper class and the lower class. Daru thinks that his mother would not have died if they had air-conditioner at home. Professor Julius Superb rightly comments

The distinction between members of these two groups is made on the basis of context of an important resource; air-conditioning. You see the elite have managed to re-create for themselves the living standards of say, Sweden without leaving the dirty plains of the sub-continent.

Teamwork

Teamwork is another characteristic of dramaturgy theory. Here individuals work together in order to gain a specific goal. Both Daru and Mumtaz go to heera mundi, Mumtaz wants to get data from the prostitutes living there. Both meet Dilaram in heera Mundi and hear the story told by Dilaram.

I was a pretty girl, like this one here! She smiles at our adolescent tea server... The landlord of our area asked me to come to his house. I refused, so he threatened to kill my family, When I went, he raped me.

Mumtaz shuts her eyes to hear it. Daru and Mumtaz, as team-mates collect this data as Mumtaz with the psudo name of Zulifkar Minto, gets the data.

Daru and Murad Badsha develop a relationship which lead them to the ways of the outlaws. Entrapped by heroine (Mumtaz) and heroin, Daru joins hands with Murad. He makes Daru to understand that his should take revenge from the society and the people, responsible for his tragic life. Daru says

Murad Badsha's my dealer, occasionally amusing desperately insecure, and annoyingly find of clearing that he's dangerous outlaw.

Daru directly expresses his feelings about Murad. Murad considers air-conditioners "unnatural and dangerous". Murad loves load-shedding as it amuses him to see the rich on the grounds of their big houses, fanning themselves in darkness.

Indeed, nothing made Murad Badsha happier than the distress of the rich.

Like Murad, Daru also gets happiness to see rich people in distress. The following extract shows such happiness what Malik Jawan asks about his cheque.

Let me just find out, I call customers services and give them the account numbers. 'I'm afraid it hasn't gone through yet.' 'That's ridiculous, I deposited it a week ago.' I'm enjoying his discomfort.

Daru's relatives - his Fatty Chacha his cousins and phuppoes are affectionate and loving. They are worried about financial issue Daru is facing now. Fatty Chacha also faces financial pressures, but he does whatever he can do for Daru. Daru says to him

'Could I borrow two thousand?'

Fatty Chacha looks uncomfortable, "of course he says". 'Let me give you five hundred now, and I'll take out some money from the bank tomorrow.' These are Daru's relatives, showing the familial relationship within middle class in the society.

Social Scripts

As described before, social scripts are pre-established patterns of behavior which individuals follow in specific social contexts. The elite social circles of Lahore have their own set of social scripts, governing their interactions. Ozi's friends, Ozi, and Mumtaz are seen following the scripts associated with their privileged status as they attend lavish parties displaying their wealth. What follows is the observation of Daru about the rich in the party.

Then I'm inside. I see the familiar focus of Lahore's party crowd, and soon. I'm caught up in the whole hugging, handshaking cheek kissing scene. Tonight's venue is a mansion with marble floors and twenty-foot ceiling.

The above extract shows how the elite engage in conspicuous consumption, their social connections – "hugging, handshaking, cheek-kissing" – maintain their image and standing within the social circle they belong to.

Servant-employer script can be seen in the relationship between Daru and Mannuci. Such social script defines their respective roles—as master and servant their expectations. Daru, as the master, holds an authoritative position. While Mannuci, as the servant, has a subordinate role. Mannuci obeys Daru quietly, but smiles when Mumtaz comes to meet Daru. Daru calls him "the mystically minded Mannuci". But Mannuci sometimes takes liberties while violating the servant-employer script Mannuci asks Daru not to sell heroin and drugs by saying

'This is wrong saab, You shouldn't sell charas.'

Daru slaps Mannuci and Mannuci leaves the house next morning. Daru spontaneously says

Somehow, I know that he won't come back Mannuci is gone. My own servant has left me, left because of one little slap. That boy had better pray I never see him, again. To think that I fed him sheltered from for all these years, and this is his loyalty, his gratitude.

Later on, we come to know that Mannuci starts working for Mumtaz and helps Mumtaz track witnesses for her article.

Audience Segregation

As mentioned earlier, audience segregation is a key concept in the dramaturgy theory. It means that individuals speak differently to different people. Daru calls Ozi his best friend. They studied and played together. When Ozi gives Daru a cigarette and Daru remembers the days spent in the company of Ozi.

Suddenly, I'm aware of a connection. I haven't felt in long time a bond of boyhood trust and affection. I look at Ozi and see my old friend's image, a younger face projected onto this fatter balder screen.

In this extract, Daru seems enthusiastic while remembering the boyhood days with Ozi, his best friend. The following excerpt also shows the trust of Ozi over Daru.

When Daru asks Ozi the reason of Mumtaz's unhappiness, Ozi tells.

'I don't know, yaar'

'What makes you think she's unhappy?'

'Little things. She never wants to talk. She's always tired. She's snappish with Muazzam.'

'Lahore isn't New York. Maybe she doesn't like the city.'

It is observed that both of them share the strange bond of friendship, full of trust and compassion. But when Mumtaz wants to end her extra-marital relationship with Daru. Daru abruptly remarks about Ozi.

'But he's a murderer. Doesn't that mean anything to you? How can you stay within?'

'I'm leaving.'

Suddenly I understand. I grab her arm. 'Has he threatened you?'

'I'm screaming.' 'I'll kill the bastard.'

Now Daru is with Mumtaz. He calls Ozi a murderer as Ozi in his Pajero has killed a boy. Daru is ready to shoot Ozi, calling Ozi a bastard. First, Ozi was his best friend. Now he calls him a bastard.

CONCLUSION

The in-depth analysis of Mohsin's Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* has demonstrated that the characters in the novel use language for the expression of their own identities. Being a powerful means of resistance and power, language is used for the construction of identities, regarding the positioning of characters within the social hierarchies. It is language which enables these characters to challenge the prevalent cultural norms with their linguistic choices and interactions. They construct their identities in ever-changing world. The

complex threads of identity construction are woven throughout the novel. Undoubtedly, language emerges as a powerful force to unfold these intricacies. They skillfully choose language as a mirror and a mask in the search of self-identification.

Future research may be conducted in comparison of *Moth Smoke* with other contemporary novels from various cultural backgrounds in order to explore how cultural specificity of language influence the shaping of identities. Norton (2016:477) is optimistic about the future of identity work as the "the profound digital innovations" are taking place now. Studies can explore how social media and internet communication influence identity construction in the digital era.

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