Literary Education and Postmodern Culture in Hamid’s Betrayal

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Abstract

This research study endeavors to analyze Omar Shahid Hamid’s novel Betrayal (2021) in the light of Lyotard’s theoretical theory of postmodernism and Linda Hutcheon’s theoretical concepts. Jean Francois Lyotard’s theory of postmodern metanarratives versus mininarratives was proposed and published in his The Postmodern Condition (1979). According to his theoretical concept of mininarratives, postmodernism poses significant challenges to conventional narratives of knowledge, reason, rationality, science, truth, nationality and objectivity. It also involves a complex set of discourses which resist a final closure or fixed definition. On the other hand, Hutcheon’s theory was proposed in A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction published in 1988. This study uses textual analysis as a research method in order to trace postmodern characteristics in words, sentences, dialogues, conversations and the text. The study ends with findings and recommendations for future research.

Introduction

The idea that postmodernism is a continuation of modernism or a break from modernism, is still in debate. The preface ‘post’ implies that postmodernism comes after modernism, however, Charles Jencks, a prominent voice in postmodern theories, is of the view that postmodernism represents both the conditions i.e. a break with as well as a continuity of Modernism. He (1992) states, “post-modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence” (27). David Harvy in his Condition of Postmodernism describes, “Postmodernism, by way of contrast, privileges heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse” (9). Taylor & Winquist (2001) define, “Postmodernist cogently articulates its sense of the contingent, thus explaining human experience, not in terms of some principle beyond the reach of change and chance, but in terms of the variability and diversity of historical, local, and random forces (303).” However, according to William Spanos, “Postmodernism is not a strictly American or British enterprise, but a truly international movement (A Postmodern Reader 38).” On the other hand, Jean Francois Lyotard (1924–1988) was a French theorist who named the dominating/hegemonic discourses as metanarratives and his focus was interdisciplinary “that included epistemology, the human mind, postmodern art, critical theory, film, time, the sublime, and a strong link between literature and politics” (Ashraf et al. p.124). He wrote 26 books and different research articles. His best known is The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, published in 1979. He was of the view that post World War has challenged the metanarratives which were based on science, knowledge, truth, justice, rationality, science and politics. Since postmodernism has become an international phenomenon so it has effected all the continents without any discrimination. Similarly, its effects have impacted culture, education, politics, economy, migration and literature of Pakistan as well.

Pakistan has so far produced many globally recognized fiction writers such as Kamila Shamsie, Muneeza Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, Uzma Aslam Khan, Muhammad Hanif, Sara Suleri, Bina Shah, Bilal Tanweer, Ahmed Farooq and many other writers. Moreover, “Postmodern philosophy has impacted world literature including American, British, Canadian, French and South Asian in terms of representation of various national and international issues in an experimental style” (Ashraf, p.2). Omar Shahid Hamid is a Pakistani author who was born on October 23, 1977. By profession, he is serving in the police service of Pakistan. His novel The Prisoner (2013) became a bestseller in both India and Pakistan, was long listed for the DSC South Asia Literature Prize. His second novel, The Spinner’s Tale (2015) won the Karachi Literature Festival’s fiction prize in 2017, and also won the Italy Reads Pakistan prize in the same year. His third novel The Party Worker (2017) won the Karachi Literature Festival Fiction Prize. His other novel The Fix (2019) highlighted the corrupt world of cricket and its match-fixing politics. Betrayal is his fifth novel.

This study explores the novel from the perspective of postmodern subversion of metanarratives in relation to modern logic. Along with Lyotard’s mininarratives, this study also evaluates the selected text in the light of Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction to explore fictionality and historicity. It highlights a unique style of production and...
creation of history. It highlights how the novel presents multiple perspectives on various historical events, and, in this way, problematizes the grand narrative of objective history.

Research Questions

1. How does the novel Betrayal exhibit postmodern instances in the light of Lyotard’s incredulity towards metanarratives?
2. What are the occasions of history, memory and nostalgia that reflect Hitcheon’s historiographic metafiction?

Literature Review

Since postmodernism is an outgrowth of modernism, so, a certain level of familiarization with the modern era is essential. However, modernism actually started as a cultural movement of late nineteenth century that was also known as enlightenment era or age of reason. It attempts to see the world in a rational order that moves through scientific and mathematical investigation towards progress. The modern philosophy was based on Ezra Pound’s “make it new” (Childs, p. 3) that can be seen in the works like Joyce’s Ulysses and Eliots’ The Waste Land. This philosophical shift from modern to postmodern condition occurred due to rejection of enlightenment notions proposed by German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. Moreover, World War Two brought a significant change from belief in science, progress, truth, justice, knowledge and history to a postmodern uncertainty and ambiguity. “In 1970, the talk would all have been of postmodernist literature” (Connor, p.12). This shift was represented in world literature in the form of a challenge to metanarratives of peace, war, justice, freedom and democracy. As quoted in Postmodernism and Society:

First apparently used in Spanish by Frederico de Onis in the 1930s, it is in the literary commentaries of Irving Howe, Harry Levin, Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan himself that the term gained currency in the 1950s and 1960s, then in 1980s, especially through the philosophical intervention of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s The Postmodern Condition. (pp.1-5)

Similarly, a very important study “Violence, Extremism, and Terrorism: A Critique on Omer Shahid Hamid’s The Spinner’s Tale” highlight Hamid’s representation of a fictional character, young boy, who is also a cricket lover, but turns into a jihadi after getting convinced by student’s wing of an ethnic party. “Though he cuts himself off from his immediate world (family and friends) but still is afraid of dying alone (p.1292).” Sheikh Ahmed Uzair Sufi, also known as Ausi, is the main character in The Spinner’s Tale. Another study titled “I Fall Upon the Thorns of Life! I Bleed! Tracing Ausi’s Right to Main in Omar Shahid Hamid’s The Spinner’s Tale (2015), has assessed the same novel in the lights if its representation of the bio-political power and maiming ability along with the consequential disability of villainous/tragic characters to reflect normal behavior as a result of tragedy/ies. “Omar Shahid Hamid, the renowned Police officer and the crime fiction writer (2015) has brought forward the fictional account of the factual crime story that links Ausi to a real life terrorist Umar Saeed Sheikh who has currently been released by the Supreme Court of Pakistan (p.22).” These studies show that Hamid’s fiction represents the current conflicts between society and government that further causes misunderstanding in people. For instance, “Analyzing State Failure and its Consequences in Omar Shahid Hamid’s The Prisoner” highlights the state negligence in fulfilling the basic rights of its citizens. “Justice is either denied or delayed, putting citizens’ fundamental human rights at stake (p.143).” On the other hand, Shuja Nawaz opines about Hamid’s latest novel Betrayal:

Another riveting thriller ripped from the headlines by Omar Shahid Hamid. The counterterrorism expert takes you on a high-speed chase down the rabbit hole of hostile South Asian politics. The search for an Indian mole at the heart of Pakistan’s security structure takes you across the globe at breathless speed, combining a love story with the murky world of spy craft. You will want to read it non-stop. (n.p)

The above mentioned literature shows that although Omar Shahid Hamid’s fiction is gaining popularity day by day but there is still some gap in the research which is done on it. It has been analyzed from different perspectives but in a limited way or perspective. However, the study of existing literature of Hamid’s latest novel demonstrates a dearth of research on it. And the presence of mere reviews or essays does not fulfill the research gap. Therefore, the current study analysis the novel from wider perspective of postmodernism that further leads to detailed discussion of mininarratives and historiographic metafiction.

Research Methodology

The present research analyzes the novel in the light of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s theory of postmodern condition, proposed in his The Postmodern Condition. Lyotard states, “The term postmodern designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts” (p.7). He shows his disbelief towards the hegemonic influence of metanarratives in the light of postmodern multiplicity of meanings. Rivera-van Schagen, Judy, and Judith
Rivera-van Schagen quote, “These metanarratives, petits recits, as Peter Berry says, are provisional, contingent, temporary, and relative and provide a basis for actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances” (p.151).

Similarly, Linda Hutcheon, another prominent authority on postmodernism, opines within the realm of postmodernist criticism as, “is a more general questioning of any totalizing or homogenizing system. Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate any neat attempts at unifying coherence (formal or thematic). Historical and narrative continuity and closure are contested, but again, from within” (Hutcheon, p. 12). Postmodern text challenges to the concord, coherence, concord, continuity (formal or thematic) and uniformity of the purpose. Moreover, the structural organization and thematic concerns reflect the ideas of ruptures, fragmentation, cracks, gaps and plurality.

Furthermore, this study uses textual analysis (content analysis) as a research method as “There is no such thing as a single, ‘correct’ interpretation of any text. There are large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances” (McKee, p. 4). Similarly, “According to Frey and Kreps (1999), the aim of textual analysis is to explain the content, function and structure of the message enclosed in a text. There are four main approaches of Textual Analysis; Content Analysis, Rhetorical Analysis, Performance Analysis and Interaction Analysis” (Salahuddin, Seher, Saba Zaidi, and Saman Salah, p. 38.). Weber defines, “Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from the text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message” (p.9).

Discussion

Betrayal is a story of a captured spy and about a woman who is looking for redemption. It is also based on the struggle of a national security advisor for the welfare of his country. Here a captured spy reveals the presence of a threatening mole within the intelligence establishment, and the assignment is handed over to Constantine D’Souza, an ex-police officer and a man neglected long ago, to proceed for the hunt. But he is totally caught in a complicated world of shadows, lies and betrayal during the process to unearth the mole. The novel has twenty four chapters and it starts with prologue and ends with epilogue.

Mininarratives

Content analysis highlights the presence of mininarratives in the novel, which represent a postmodern response to fixed metanarratives. This study highlights that Betrayal depicts disillusionment with the so called grand narratives as the characters are in quest of a new epistemology that may provide new meaning to their concepts through mini narratives (petit narratives). The characters generate micronarratives through their conversations, as Lyotard is of the opinion that any social communication takes place as a result of language games which are produce metanarratives, but, at the same time, such moves challenge these fixed notions and generate little truths. However, his concept of mininarratives reflects the tolerance towards differences between language games, plurality and contextualized forms of truth.

Transformation of Language

Betrayal as a postmodern text rejects the notion of Standard English Language rather it uses localized version to represent relative realities through language. Textual analysis reveals that different words that represent local culture, religion, and local and international languages have been incorporated, for instance, Zizou leaves the drug business because “Muslim brothers told him it was haram” (p.17). Here the Urdu word ‘haram’ means forbidden by Islam. This transformation of Standard English reflects the inclusive society as represented in the novel, for example, at other instance, V.S Krishnamurthy, an intelligence officer, who is not very religious, admits this to Zail Singh in a way as, “I’m not like you bloody sardarji, trying to learn the Granth Sahib by rote every morning” (p.21). The Guru Granth Sahib is regarded as sovereign, eternal and final Guru by Sikhs who is on the list of lineage of ten prominent gurus of Sikhism. He expresses his likeness towards Rachmaninoff that surprises his friend Zail Singh who refers to his wife’s reservation, “And how did Bhabhi allow Rachmaninoff over the sounds of bhajans this morning? (p.21)”. Similarly, the sentence “Bismillah Rehman Rahim gentlemen…The scheme of my presentation will be as follows (p.61)” contains Muslim practice to start over the sounds of bhajans this morning! (p.21). Kumar was kept in detention after being caught on the grounds of being an Indian spy but he was considered as hero on the basis of “How the memory of his wife’s mangalsutra and the Tiranga kept him alive.(p.339)”

Similarly, the novel is full of French words because the story is also set in France, for example, when Zizou is caught by French police who starts abusing him by using a mixture of English and French words because he was a hybrid child to Pakistani mother and French father. “Don’t you resist you fucking Beur!”(p.16). Beur means a person who is born in France. At another instance they call Zizou “You piece of Merde” (p.16) that means a
humours alternative for shit. The text uses a very famously used French word When Zizou is caught for being Jihadi, “You’re fucked now mon ami (p.18),” here mon ami means my friend. Aleena and her sister Mano had their family’s royal pedigree and their mother constantly used to make them realize this. Further, they were not having any male siblings so “Maman also persistently reminded them to marry well” (p.32). Maman is French word that means mother.

The novel as a postmodern text reflects ironical occasions, such as, when Constantine happens to see Wing Commander’s anxiety while preparing and giving presentation. Text writes, “He is, after all, one of the finest warriors in the Army and has spent the last 24 hours constructing a magnificent presentation whose piece de resistance is fancy acronyms” (p.61). Here the French phrase piece de resistance means a big achievement as it is ironical that Wing Commander instead of working on content or his duty, is busy in beautification of presentation. At another instance, Aleena is transformed from being a fashion model to a home loving person, and, she tells Sameer that “Karl used to call me a casanier, a homebody” (p.148). Hamid writes the English translation i.e. homebody next to French word 'casanier', in order to facilitate the reader. The text adds element of humor when Constantine De’Souza shows his disgust at never receiving appropriate pronunciation of his name, “Consenteen Desoosa. One more person butchering a perfectly easy name” (p.297).


**Fragmentation**

The story does not travel in a linear framework in a postmodern fashion as Andreas Huyssen opine, “Postmodern fiction has come to contest the modernist ideology of artistic autonomy, individual expression, and the deliberate separation of art from mass culture and everyday life (p.53).” Rather the novel begins in the present scenario and then takes the reader back to old time i.e. almost twenty-five years back. And, as a postmodern text, the principle of fragmentation installs a unifying connection between various characters. So, in spite of its numerous cracks, Hamid’s novel forms a unified postmodern whole, an aesthetic beauty made up of plurality. Hamid reflects the bitter realities of Karachi like poverty, racism, political corruption, terrorism, social unrest and women issues. For instance, the prologue of the novel comments on the poor state of Karachi when D’Souza thinks, “The ends of the earth. That’s what this place looks like. The edge of the modern world, a junkyard where the detritus of a post-industrial society is dumped (p.5).” It refers to postmodern laments at the adverse impact of scientific hazards on environment “The air itself seems infused with diesel fumes (ibid).”

Furthermore, the novel reflects blurred boundaries between emotions of love/hatred that exist in fragmented relationships. For example, Aleena and her twenty-one years old son Zeinedine Karoachi are not living in a traditional relationship, “He’s an illegitimate child (p.304).” He behaves like a rebel who gets involved in terrorist activities and he “was arrested by French authorities for being involved with terror groups who had links to Daesh (p.304).” Similarly, the novel challenges the fixed personality notion while depicting different characters as Constantine observes awkward behaviors in his office workplace, “New Head of Administration, after a lifetime of whoring and boozing decided to become a born-again Wahabi” (p.171) and has ordered not to use air conditioners in offices. The conversation between characters reveals their problematic personalities and, in this way, challenges the metanarratives of politics, nationality and patriotism. An army officer General Shahram comments, “Our politicians are all ruthless cock suckers. They are governed by nothing except their naked self-interest (p.346).” He further expresses his distrust on war and its objectives when he says, “We’re all the same. This is a cold war (p.346).”

The text demonstrates that a name can be changed as per the personality of a character, “Karl used to call me a casanier, a homebody” (p.148). This time, a translated version is also given in order to facilitate the reader. Constantine looks at the modern advancement of his city i.e. Karachi with much contempt. “As the insanity of car horns increases” (p.170) he can sense that his city is facing “traffic congestion” (p.170) and “vast expanse of office buildings and shopping plazas that populate Saddar. Like city, he himself is also confused as he reveals “I hadn’t really thought about what to do next (p.348).” He further admits that “I haven’t been to church in years (p.349).”

Textual analysis highlights that Aleena does not remain consistent character “she has dramatically altered her appearance and the retired supermodel-fashionista is gone forever (p.315).” She was also a mother of illegitimate child named Zeinedine Karoachi. Moreover, as Sameer Khan’s x-girlfriend, it was considered that “she did start actively working for Indians (p.302).” Her son Zizou is also a postmodern character who does not know anything about his life in clear terms. He believes in the narrative of Jihad, but Sameer tries to tell him the other side of the picture. Zizou is hopeful that Khilafa will be established soon that will punish the women who are not loyal to their husbands/families. Sameer argues with him about Taliban and Mousawi, to which, he says, “You know nothing about Islam (p.227),” but Sameer replies, “Son, I know more about Islam than you ever will. They take confused boys like you and they use them for their own ends and then they throw them away
(p.227).” Sameer himself was very capable person so much so that, “When Prime Minister Hamdani came to power, he brought him into the National Security Advisor’s office first as the deputy and then in the main seat (p.26).”

**Intertextuality**

_Betrayal_, as a postmodern novel, exhibits pluralism in reading, multiplicity in meaning, and subjective interpretation. It refers to different characters, books, songs, poetry and stories that reflect on Hamid’s vast knowledge as well as add in reader’s information. For instance, D’Souza being an efficient police officer refers to a famous character. “He enjoys being an analyst, a kind of Sherlock Holmesian detective, tracing clues from the most obscure details” (p.11) Next, the text refers to lyrics of a song Dead Wrong by the famous B.I.G when a character named Zeinedine Karoachi hears it.

“Hit mummy in the tummy if the hooker plays a dummy.

Who you think you’re dealing with? (p.15)

There are references to different famous books like when Zizou is captured by police for promoting military theory of Jihad, “The Global Islamic Resistance Call by Abu Musab al Suri. Bye bye Zizou” (p.18). They refer to 1600-page book that got fame by outlining a pragmatic future strategy for jihadist movement. Abu Musab al Suri remained an al-Qaeda operative who also ran once of al-Qaeda military training camp in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, there is seen presence of many religious figures that, not only, add beauty to the text but also captures the maximum attention of the readers. For instance, Krishnamurthy is a music lover and he shares his appreciation of the third concerto by Rachmaninoff to Zail Singh. But Zail Singh seems to have his own opinion about Rachmaninoff, therefore, he takes this music as “ungodly” (p.22). And, in response, Krishnamurthy says, “Rachmaninoff isn’t ungodly. Brings you closer to whatever God you believe in much more so than any bloody priest feeding you handfuls of Prasad” (p.22). In fact, Sergei Rachmaninoff was a famous Russian-American pianist, conductor and composer, and he represented romantic Russian classical music.

Similarly, the textual analysis of this novel highlights the reading habits and choices of different characters, such as, Aleena, who use to read different magazines as pastime hobby. Once she was in flight and she started reading “the latest issue of British Vogue, a Khaleej Times (p.30).” Two characters, Sameer and Aleena happen to use great lines from literary texts that also show their interest in literature. Once, Aleena even wore a kurta containing Urdu couplet by Ghalib as

_Ye na thee hamarae qismat ke wisaal e-yaar hota_  
_Agar aur jeete rehte yahee intezaar hota_

(It was not my destiny that there would be a union with my beloved.  
If I had lived further on, there would have been this same waiting) (p.128)

At other point, they recite Omar Khayyam’s poetry as,  
“…He breaks the Dukes by day and Knights by night” (p.144). The addition of these poetical lines from Omar Khayyam’s poetry reflects characters’ sensible attachment to literature. Aleena reads one line while her lover Sameer completes with second line. They reunite after a long time but still Sameer remembers the poetry “I still read him. I read a couple of quatrains to myself” (p.144). He further adds, “It always made me feel better about the world. And it reminded me of you” (p.144). Not only that, the novel incorporates phrases, poetry and lines from important works rather it also relates real life stories with imagination and creativity. This metafictional technique is a postmodern characteristic that blurs the boundary between reality and fiction. Like an Indian spy Kumar is caught by Pakistan and then he is sent back to India and it is suggested by Krishnamurthi, one of the characters, “I wouldn’t be surprised if a Bollywood producer decided to try his hand at making a movie out of the whole sorry situation (p.250).” He further suggests the actors, “Maybe one of the Khans can be persuaded to play Kumar” (p.250).

“He is now on the strip of No Man’s Land” (p.337).

**Historiographic metafiction**

Other than mininarratives, the novel also highlights the historical instances during the conversations of Indian intelligence officers who seem worried about their spy Kumar who is arrested by Pakistani police. They are planning to recover their nationality holder agent back from Pakistan, “The mistake they (Pakistani) made in intelligence off...” (p.26).” Sameer himself was very capable person so much so that, “When Prime Minister Hamdani came to power, he brought him into the National Security Advisor’s office first as the deputy and then in the main seat (p.26).”

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Another instance, Sameer asks D’Souza, “You studied history. Don’t you know Neville Chamberlain’s famous words after he met Hitler in Munich in 1938? Peace in our time” (p.305). D’Souza’s asks, “What does that mean, sir?.” Sameer explains further, “It can mean anything you want it to mean. It meant a great deal to me. Until now (p.305).” On the other hand, the novel incorporates two very important aspects of postmodern
historiographic metafiction i.e. memory and nostalgia. In this respect, the characters in the novel also talk about their personal history(s) as Sameer Ali Khan, at one point, gets nostalgic while remembering his father’s house. “The house he grew up in is a throwback to the 1980s when imitation ‘white houses’ with prominent porticos and Doric columns were the architectural rage in Karachi” (p.101). He laments at the present neglect of beautiful old buildings when he say, “The columns are overgrown with creepers, and the term ‘white house’ is now a misnomer, as the peeling paint and layers of dust make the structure look at best like a ‘gray house’ (p.101).” Sameer visits his father’s house and he becomes deeply nostalgic. He expresses his delight on meeting his longtime girlfriend as, “Wow, Aleena, you look as fit as you did twenty-five years ago (p.142).” They both visit the old memorable places where they used to meet and make love, and Sameer refers to a direction, “Aleena, this place….”, but he leaves the sentence incomplete that is continued by Aleena, “….is full of memories, Sameer. Our memories (p.143).” It shows that good memories also help them to restore their relationship as Aleena says, “After twenty-five years, you’re still completing my sentences (p.144).” This play of memory, nostalgia and present time complicates the text as Lyotard opines, “A postmodern writer is in the position of a philosopher, the text he writes is not in principal governed by pre-established rules (A Postmodern Reader, p. 50).”

Conclusion
The present study analyzed Betrayal as a postmodern text in the light of Lyotard and Hutcheon’s theoretical concepts of mininarrative and historiographic metafiction. This study has highlighted various postmodern characteristics such as multiple realities, intertextuality, irony, unconventional characters, fragmentation, nostalgia, memory and transformed language. The study proved that mininarratives do replace fixed metanarratives in the novel Betrayal. Intertextuality is one of the mininarratives that connects the reader with different texts thus by challenging the ultimate autonomy of its so called modern/independent status. Likewise, mininarrative of fragmentation challenges the conventional formula of the novel i.e. proper beginning, middle and end. It also transformed the normal development of story rather it showed unpredictable characters that display both the negative as well as positive personality traits. Therefore, they cannot be placed in the clear cut categories of hero/protagonist or villain. This study is quite significant for the teachers, students and researchers and it will help them to understand literature from various dimensions in the light of postmodernism.

Recommendations
In future, the selected novel Betrayal can be studies as a representative of postmodern metafiction. It can also be studies in terms of its representation of issues of caste and other regional hierarchies in Pakistan particularly and South Asia generally.

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References


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