

A MOTIVATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE MIMETIC CHARACTERS OF MA AND CHEEL IN TEHMINA DURRANI'S NOVEL *BLASPHEMY*

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Abstract:

The discussion on the relative importance of the 'character' versus 'plot' in literary works is endless and still going-on. From Aristotle to the present day, every theorist has his own theoretical perspective on this issue depending on his own understanding of the nature, function, and aim of literature in society. Aristotle, A.C. Bradley, E.M. Forster, structuralist narratologists, modern psychoanalysts, and recent cognitive narratologists have been talking about and still arguing for or against the relative importance of 'character' against 'plot'. Marvin Mudrick, and Robert Scholes & Robert Kellogg categorize the character as '*semiotic/mimetic*', and '*aesthetic/illustrative/mimetic*' respectively. Mudrick and Scholes & Kellogg's *mimetic* category refers to the realistic form of literature. Such characters exist in realistic literature, and they must be treated as near to real human beings because they are independent entities having their inner life and motivations, and they guide the plot and theme, not the other way round, in a literary piece of art. Such characters cannot be analyzed in structuralists' theoretical terms, as they are considered as independent entities, and not as a structural part of the plot. Considering Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy* a realist novel in Pakistani setting, this paper presents a motivational analysis of two of its characters, Ma and Cheel. Ma is an *expansive (perfectionist)* person, and Cheel's character transforms from *perfectionist* to *arrogant-vindictive*. Nonetheless, she displays *compliant* attitude only towards Heer.

Keywords: Pakistani Women Novelists, Character, Fictive Persons, Semiotic, Aesthetic, Illustrative, Mimetic, Psychoanalysis, Motivational analysis, Karen Horney, Bernard Paris, Tehmina Durrani

Previous Study:

Aristotle considers plot as relatively more important element than character. He states : “tragedy is not a representation of men but of a piece of action [...]. Moreover, you could not have a tragedy without action, but you can have one without character-study” (Aristotle, [1927] 1932: 1450a). Bradley and Chatman provide humanistic theories of literature supporting character, while structuralist Barthes supports the plot. For Bradley, “the calamities and catastrophes follow inevitably from the deeds of men, and that the main source of these deeds is character” (Bradley, [1904] 1964: 13). Although Chatman (1978) is a structuralist, he replaced Barthes’ concept of ‘semes’ with his concept of ‘traits’, and realized the psychological value of characters. In 1927, E.M. Forster in his flat/round distinction of characters has alluded to the existence of mimetic character in literature. He sensed the humanlikeness in round characters, thus remarked that round characters “are capable of surprising in a convincing way” (Forster [1927] 1985 : 78). Propp (1928) considered looking at characters in terms of functional elements operative in the larger structure of the plot. His structuralist method concentrated on 31 common elements in the structure of 100 fairy tales. Mudrick (1961) provided two categories of characters in literature, i.e. *semiotic/mimetic* (or purist/realist). His semiotic or purist category represents structuralists’ concept of character, while his mimetic or realist category stands for the humanist theorists. Scholes & Kellogg’s ([1966] 2006) “*aesthetic*”, “*illustrative*”, and “*mimetic*” categories of character are similar to Mudrick’s categories. Scholes & Kellogg opine that *mimetic* characters independently exist in realistic form of literature. Barthes (1970) considers characters as composition of semes. His structuralist view states: “When identical *semes* repeatedly cross the same proper name and appear to establish themselves there, a character emerges” (Barthes [1970] 1974 : 101). Margolin (1983) views characters as humanlike entities generated in the minds of the receivers/readers. Characters are the product of readers’ cognitive processes. Phelan (1987 ; 1989) put forth three aspects of characters, and opposed static *semiotic* view of characterization. Paris considers *mimetic* characters as a distinct and independent variety of characters. He analyzed a lot of characters in Western realistic literature by employing Karen Horney’s psychoanalytical theories and Mudrick (1961) and Scholes & Kellogg’s (1966)

taxonomy of characters (see Paris 1991a ; 1991b ; 2005 ; 2012). Culpeper (2000) and Schneider (2001) consider character-creation as a cognitive process of the readers' minds. Tomasello, M., Carpenter, M., Call, J., Behne, T. & Moll, H. (2005) believe that characters have their own inner life, thoughts, and feelings. Their view is close to looking at characters through a mimetic perspective.

Procedure:

This paper originates from the taxonomy of characters in literature put forth by Mudrick (1961), and Scholes and Kellogg (1966). Psychoanalytical theories of Horney ([1945] 1992 ; 1950) and Paris (1991a ; 1991b ; 2005 ; 2012) have been employed for the analysis of 'fictive persons' (a term used for characters by Keen, 2003 : 57) in *Blasphemy*. Data for the analysis of the characters of Ma and Cheel has been taken from Durrani (2000).

Character of Ma in *Blasphemy*:

Heer's mother, Ma, displays *expansive* personality. She represents Horney's category of *perfectionists*. She has the potential and nature of moving *against* people. She goes on stressing her opinion till others agree. She is a forceful person who wants control and hold: "what are you up to? You are getting out of hand. When I call, it doesn't bother you" (Durrani, 2000 : 23). Such was her approach with Heer before her marriage. She always had a strict eye on Heer. Heer mentions about her mother that "it was common for her to make me reopen the cupboard so that she could inspect my handbag" (23). Heer mother's *neurotic claim* is if she remains attentive to all the matters (including humans beings) of externalization, nothing will go incorrect, and this was her compensation. Her bargain with fate lies in remaining watchful everywhere: " 'It is a caution against any form of dishonor that might befall our future generations from the hazardous actions of the female species which is why we are renowned for being a curse' she would say in one breath" (23). Paris marks about a *perfectionist* as: "the person who is *perfectionist* has extremely high standards, moral and intellectual, on the basis of which he looks down upon others. He takes pride in his rectitude" (Paris, [1991a] 2009: 22). A *perfectionist's* goal is a "flawless excellence [in] the whole conduct of life" (Horney, 1950: 196). At the time of Pir Sain's family visit to their place, Ma acts like a stern *perfectionist*, " 'Don't touch the chair, your hands will stain it'. She became even firmer when she said, 'there is a marriage proposal for you. They are coming to see you this evening'" (Durrani, 2000: 23-24). "The *perfectionistic* person has a legalistic bargain in which being fair, just, and dutiful entitles him" to other's fair treatment

(Paris, [1991a] 2009: 22). “This conviction of an infallible justice operating in life gives him a feeling of mastery” (Horney, 1950: 197). The *perfectionist* Ma considers herself fair and devoted when she states that the visit of those people to their house who are well-off and prosperous is based on impartiality as they are attaining Heer, her lovely daughter, in return to their affluent and greater place in society. She is also considering herself dutiful as she is trying to execute her duties of mother for the progress of all her offsprings by accepting Pir Sain’s marriage proposal for Heer. She remarks about the wealth and power of the family of Pir Sain:

‘Those people are very wealthy. They are far above our status. It is a great honour that they should even visit us. Look at us,’ she said, waving her hand around. ‘What do we have to offer him?’ And she answered her question herself, ‘it is because you are so very beautiful (Durrani, 2000: 24).

Ma is a *perfectionist* and her *should* is that she “should never make a mistake” (Paris, [1991a] 2009: 26). On the basis of this *neurotic should* she creates a bargain with fortune or perhaps in her own heart with Pir Sain only, and offers her attractive daughter to him in the expectation of a fine future of her all children:

Your marriage will restore our dignity in the community. Your sisters will marry well and your brother will get a good girl and a good job. Our status will improve tremendously. I even like his [Pir Sain’s] name. it sounds so very powerful (Durrani, 2000: 25).

Her *neurotic pride* is in her *idealized image* of her as a lady of rank and self-esteem. Her *neurotic claim* is her stress upon Heer to marry the Pir:

How can you be so selfish child? You must carry your share of your responsibility towards your sisters and brother. You are fifteen years old, you can’t sit at home forever. As young girls must not remain unattached, I am going to say yes. Besides, I don’t have the money to educate you (25).

And, “‘Get dressed and wipe that sullen look off your face. It makes you look old,’ said Ma, warning me, ‘if you don’t look pretty they will reject you, and us’” (25). Ma even voices the anxiety of rejection and the loss of her faith in a superb future of all of her children in the expression, “and us”. Her bargain is echoed through her use of this last phrase. In response to her endless demanding *neurotic claims* Heer says to Ma, “you won’t have to make any dowry for my sisters. They can share all my new things” (29-30). At this, “Ma kissed [her] head and mumbled ‘I know, I know’” (30). Ma’s kissing and then saying ‘I know, I know’ mirrors the fulfillment of her *neurotic claims* she makes on Heer. Ma’s chiefly *perfectionist* defense strategy forces her to make every thinkable effort to position all things

neatly and flawlessly and in accordance with the criteria of the family of Pir Sain at the time of their coming for Heer's marriage proposal. Heer tells thus:

Despite the fact that our poverty was visible in everything, Ma tried desperately to hide it. 'Every almond in the *qorma* must be tasted, or the curry will be bitter and ruin our name'. as almonds were expensive, somebody suggested plain mutton curry, but Ma would not hear of it and retorted, 'Almonds were cooked in foods prepared for kings. They will make up for the lack of everything else' (30-31).

At the time of Heer's marriage to Pir Sain, "Ma lectured [her] at every opportunity" (31):

'Uphold your father's honour by showing good breeding. Always remain subservient to your husband's will. Never put yourself in a position where you need to give explanations or make complaints.' This did not seem difficult to follow and I promised repeatedly that I would not fail her (31).

Talking about the value structure of an *expansive* person Paris opines:

The person in whom *expansive* tendencies are predominant has goals, traits, and values that are quite the opposite of those of the self-effacing person. What appeals to him most is not love, but mastery. He abhors helplessness, is ashamed of suffering (Paris, [1991a] 2009: 21).

Such person needs "to achieve success, prestige, or recognition" (Horney, [1945] 1992: 65). Ma is quite the opposite of Heer who is a *complaint* person. Ma requires triumph and status, though is not too much enthusiastic for recognition. She bargains for the status and victory of her whole family. The values of an *expansive* person are evident in Ma as a measure of her character structure all over the novel. She desires to lead her destiny through the defensive strategy of a *perfectionist*. The *should* of a *perfectionist* is not to commit an error, but she made a blunder in her recognition of Pir Sain. Her *shoulds* turned tyrannical throughout the development of the novel when she received nothing from Pir Sain for her other children, but emotional collapse and self hate of her son and the exposure of the unfulfillment of her own dreams.

After few pages of the novel Ma's character vanishes. It reemerges near the closure of the story after the murder of Pir Sain. Here her *perfectionist* motivation completely dies. She, after remaining ineffective in her *neurotic claims* established on the wedding of her daughter with Pir Sain, comprehends her mistake. Her original self-praise of a *perfectionist* is transformed into her self hate. She states to Heer, "There is not one prayer, nor any shrine, where I have not begged our Lord to release you from your bondage, in safety and without

pain (Durrani, 2000: 186). Her self hate is evident in her pursuing pardon from Heer, “Forgive me, my child ... when your uncle went for *Haj*, I told him the truth and swore him to secrecy. ‘Free my daughter from Satan [Pir Sain], tell Allah to take him, only He can punish him’” (187). Ma’s sense of remorse and self hate gets deeper on the disappointment of her *perfectionistic* strategy which destroys the whole life of Heer. Ma could never recover of her excessive remorse. Last words of the novel mirror her sorrow and self hate, “May Allah forgive me for sending my child to hell. May Allah reward her patience and give her another chance to live. One chance. Some chance. Any chance, O Allah” (227). She is no more an *expansive perfectionist* person.

Character of Cheel in *Blasphemy*:

Cheel verifies herself as *expansive (arrogant-vindictive)* in her deed of killing Pir Sain, but earlier covers her vindictiveness in the form of her externally enacted false appearance of *perfectionist*. Heer’s first impression of Cheel when she saw her for the first time after her marriage was of “an eagle like woman” (Durrani, 2000: 41). As a *perfectionist* she was watchful and at her guards while performing her duty. “With her arms folded on her chest, her back humped and her head jutting forward, she looked like a giant vulture ready to swoop down” (42). About her first impression of Cheel, Heer tells that her “eyes fell on an eagle like woman standing in a doorway. She was watching everyone as if it were her duty, as if everyone was committing some crime” (41). She attains confidence of Pir Sain by making him believe that she is *perfectionist*, and can carry out his allotted duties very well, hence becomes successful in securing a place very near to him by becoming his spy. Moreover, she was *complaint* only towards Heer, although she never displayed this in her conduct and talk to avoid distrust of Pir Sain perhaps. On Heer’s query that why she delayed the entire lifetime to kill Pir Sain, Cheel replied that it was for Heer that she delayed so long to kill Pir Sain. She expressed to Heer, “You were not ready before now, *bibiji*” (194). She told Heer that throughout twenty four years of her marriage with Pir Sain Heer was not prepared for his murder, so she did not kill him before that. It was an act of a *complaint* person. She presented *complaint* compulsion in her feelings towards Heer, despite her predominant *arrogant-vindictive* motivation for killing him. So her *complaint* approach towards Heer bound her to utilize a life-time in order to complete “the mission [revenge on Pir Sain] of her forefathers” (194).

Conclusion:

The present motivational analysis of two characters of Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy* prove that this novel is an example of realistic fiction in Pakistani literature, and the indigenous fiction written in English by women novelists can be analyzed through a *mimetic* perspective.

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