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AN INVESTIGATION OF MARGINAL STATUS OF ANDROGYNOUS SELVES THROUGH FIGURATIVE PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based study aims to explore the representation of androgynous persons at margins in the society. The marginalization and exploitation of the males having feminine traits in their personality have been depicted through the painting. The focus of this research project is to examine, discuss, and critically evaluate the self-abuse, physical and psychological sufferings, discrimination, alienation, inferiority complex of the androgynous males in Pakistani society. The figurative painting portrayed by the researcher takes into account the plight of androgynous males because of the overlapping of masculine and feminine traits. The

in-depth analysis of the figurative painting reflects the ways in which the androgynous people are compelled to live a life which is devoid of freedom of mind and body and full of identity crisis. However, their miserable life is full of mental anguishes and various physical ferocities. The study concludes that the existence of androgynous males in Pakistani society have become compromised as they are compelled to live in liminal spaces where they are exploited incessantly. This research is descriptive in nature among qualitative approach.

INTRODUCTION

This practice-based research aims to explore the idea or concept of femininity in males through the production of artworks. In this study, the androgynous people have been presented as margins in the society and their socio-cultural life is examined coupled with the construction as well as presence of luminal spaces through figurative paintings. Like other countries in this world, many males in Pakistan possess feminine traits in their personality and they are taken as gays and sexual vibes are perceived by other normal males in the society. The gravity of the situation is that these androgynous people suffer from mental, sometime physical, anguishes throughout their lives till death. Some prominent traits which make these males androgynous are comprised of their speaking or communication, body language, genetic problems, behaviour and actions (Kazi, 2018, p. 1). In a nut shell, their gender expression and gender identity both look feminine. It is also pertinent to point out that such males may exhibit such feminine traits from their parents, therefore, their gender identity is not in their control and we cannot blame them for the expression of femininity in their personality (Memon, 2014, p. 2). Another reason behind the construction of feminine traits in males can be investigated when a baby boy in his childhood grows up with female circles at that time he starts perceiving and acting in feminine ways (Kazi, 2018, p. 1). There are many points and reasons which can be discussed in order to explain the feminine traits in males but it is a fact that such males are suffering mentally and physically in their social, cultural, economic, religious and political life styles. The situation is worst in terms of their domestic life. This research project explores and critically investigates these mentally abused males in the Pakistani society.

.The term "liminal" is derived from Latin root, which means "threshold." The liminal realm is a space where one has to leave something behind but is not yet fully committed to something new. Victor Witter Turner (1976) was a British anthropologist who coined the term "liminality" in his social change study where he regarded the traditions of social and culture as the transmission of cultural identity by highlighting the significance of social and cultural norms in constructing an individual's identity (Kazi, 2018, p. 1).

In his book "Liminal Space," Marhefka (2002) states that liminality expresses the ambiguous state of the initiate, its passage to the transitional conflicted social zone and the final phase of integration relates to the initiate's return to society with redeveloped social status (Marhefka, 2002, p. 13). Androgynous people face difficult issues from social, religious, cultural, and administrative perspectives. In a nutshell, identity is proposed to be a result of lived experience and a social construct that is constantly evolving, rather than an inherent quality and the term "liminality" means "threshold, boundary, or passage between two

distinct locations” which best described the sandwiched condition of androgynous people between stable and transformed social structures.

According to the notion of liminality, a person's temporary separation from rigid social structures confers not only an ambivalent social status but also frees him or her from any law, norm, or rule of social Conduct that would define his or her position as ambiguous and obscure (Clark, 2020, p. 30). In a luminal state, a person is neither "here" nor "there," but rather "in-between," traditionally and ceremonially established locations are known as "betwixt" and between. The individual exists in a chasm between the two realms and functions as a theoretical medium for bridging the gap between competing "here" and "there" structures. (Clark, 2020, p. 35). As a result, the individual is no longer influenced by previous and future statuses and finds himself in an indeterminate position, anticipating the emergence of reconstructed and restored cultural models and paradigms (Meehan, 2004, p. 19). Figurative art, often known as symbolic, is a form of figurative art in which the source material (particularly paintings and sculptures) is readily apparent. (Palmer, 1964, p. 256). Line, shape, color, light and dark, mass, volume, texture, and perspective are the formal elements upon which figurative art relies. However, one may also utilize these design components to produce various other images — for example, abstract or nonrepresentational or non-objective two-dimensional artwork — due to their role as design fundamentals. (Palmer, 1964, p. 256)

According to Dietch (2019), figurative art has been the aim of art-making from ancient times. Traditionally, figurative artists have sought to create works based on real-world sources and frequently depicted human beings. (Deitch, 2019, p. 2). However, there have been several arguments throughout the history of figurative art. Certain figurative artists sought to produce images beyond reality in some eras, thereby producing suggestive effects. (Levinson, 2021, p. 6). The polyvalence of this art style has allowed for a wide range of interpretations. Figurative styles that attempt to replicate nature include portrait, landscape, and still life. (Zeller, 2016, p. 74). Figurative art can also express a feeling in front of nature; it is a sublime or strange character that sometimes requires a selection in what is represented.

In the Pakistani social as well as cultural contexts, it can be observed that the androgynous people confront discriminate behavior by their fellow citizens and most of the times such people are mentally abused by the males and females of their respective social circles. Because of such unequal treatment, the androgynous people negatively reflect on their existence in this world and consider their presence as nothing else but a shame during their sitting with normal people.

In terms of the comparison of their life with the normal males in the society, they consider themselves as outsiders or strangers even in their native social and cultural milieu. This is the reason due to which they possess introvert personality and hide their feelings and emotions instead of sharing them with fellows, normal males. Although some other scholars have already investigated the concept of androgyny in various parts of the world, however, the cardinal focus of this research is to explore the miserable life of the androgynous people

who are victim of self-alienation, inferiority complex, self-shame and other psychological and physical glitches in their daily life. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it has focused upon the concept of androgyny within the domain of Pakistani socio-cultural context.

This research work is based on the exploration of those males in the Pakistani society that possess a special place because of the duality of masculine and feminine traits. Many researchers, critics and scholars have contributed a lot in terms of the exploration of the field of androgyny around this world. When the Pakistani society is taken into consideration in this regard, it can also be found that an intensive as well as extensive study has been done on transgender people. However, a wide gap has been found in the previous conducted research projects in the scholarship of gender identity because no work has been done by any researcher regarding the representation of androgynous people in Pakistani society. The liminal space in which these margins, males with feminine traits, are living are not investigated by the scholars. This study fills both of these gaps while critically investigating these margins through the production of figurative painting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fundamentally, the concept of androgyny is understood as a mixture of feminine as well as masculine characteristics which is often applied to analyze the men who possess feminine traits. Such kind of combination of dual characteristics results in an ambiguous form and this form further becomes the root cause of sufferings and tensions of that specific person in the society. Some other significant factors which are involved in the idea of androgyny are comprised of gender expression, gender identity and biological sex. These factors are inevitable when the scholarship of androgyny is taken into consideration.

Sandra Bem first offered the androgyny concept in the early 1970s. This introduction challenged society's long-held belief and psychology that masculinity and femininity are two opposing poles on a single continuum. A person is either masculine or feminine, according to this long-held belief. (Bem, 1974, p. 7). According to this hypothesis, several personality tests included M-F scales to assess the masculinity-femininity personality trait. However, according to Bem (1974), masculinity and femininity are two separate clusters of socially desirable instrumental and expressive qualities.

As far as the factor of gender expression is considered, it can be argued that fashion and personal grooming are the two agents which can help to establish an androgynous attitude in the men. It means that the expression of one's personality contributes a lot in the development of one's identity in a particular society. In the domains of the gender identity, it is pertinent to point out that androgynous can take themselves as gender neutral, gender-queer or non-binary. When the idea of androgyny is interpreted in terms of biological sex then it can be argued that it applied to a person who is considered as intersex because of his gender expression and gender identity. Therefore, according to Singer (2000), this becomes the fundamental reason due to which the dual traits make him oscillate in in-between situation (Singer, 2000, p. 18). As Zhou

(2003) states that among all these three factors, the factor of gender expression has waxed and waned, therefore, it is of paramount importance in terms of cultural as well as historical point of views (Zhou, 2003, p. 81).

Sandra Bem (1974) is one of the famous critics in the field of androgyny or effeminacy. She has also presented her view point in terms of the exploration of the term androgyny. In her most prominent work Bem Sex-Role Inventory, she has outlined some of the tools which can be implemented on specific persons in order to measure their gender identities (Zhou, 2003, p. 81). Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) is used by the psychologists and biologists for gender measures. Some unique kinds of items are utilized in order to record the individual's response after which the individual is categorized in one of the four categories of gender. The list of these categories is comprised of feminine, masculine, androgynous or undifferentiated (Zhou, 2003, p. 81). As far as the idea of gender role orientations is considered, Bem is of the view that it can be expressed by both men and women but the ultimate decision is made after analyzing the gender role orientations.

As per Bem's arguments about an androgynous individual, such person possesses a high degree of feminine characteristics which are entitled as expressive; on the other hand, the same person exhibits masculine traits which have been analyzed and found as instrumental (Bem, 1974). Furthermore, while presenting the difference between these two masculine and feminine traits McDermott (2016) in his enlightening article *The Androgynous, Undifferentiated, Masculine, and Feminine* claims that a feminine individual is ranked low in terms of the exhibition of instrumental or masculine traits and ranked high in terms of expressive or feminine traits; on the contrary, a masculine individual is ranked low in terms of feminine or expressive traits, on the other hand, such person is ranked high regarding the analysis of masculine features (McDermott, 2016).

Taywaditep (2002) in her influential article *Marginalization Among the Marginalized* considers a detailed discussion in terms of the exploration of the marginalization of the men who look like women in the society. Taywaditep believes that the most recent research is being done between the relationship of androgynous and gay in the western society. While talking about the stereotypes of gay men, she is of the view that these are comprised of some significant interests, traits, behaviors and occupations (Taywaditep, 2002, p. 40). The same traits can be found in the androgynous people as well. Furthermore, she states that such kind of people become the victim of marginalization because of the expression of abovementioned traits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study design of the current research project is based on the qualitative perspectives as qualitative research method has been used in terms of the analysis of the painting which is portrayed by the researcher. A variety of colors has been utilized by the researcher in order to reflect the real-life experiences and situations of the margins in Pakistani society. It is of paramount importance to mention that the color scheme has been used symbolically which has further helped to interpret the portraits within the domain of the topic of this study. The

issue of the research is effectively investigated with the help of these colors. Other than the colors, the researcher has used a fine quality of canvas. Different types of brushes have been utilized during the portrayal of the figurative paintings. Use of water colors coupled with these different brushes have helped to give a realistic touch to the portraits of the androgynous people.

DISCUSSION

Figurative paintings play a substantial role in terms of the exploration of bitter realities of life in this universe. The same thing is used in this research project as it also unearths the issues and problems of androgynous people in Pakistani society. (Cohen, 2019, p. 2).



Artwork: RohailRahat, Untitled 7 x 4 ft. 2022

The abovementioned painting represents the androgynous people as margins in the society due to which they suffer in many ways (Frownfelter, 2010, p. 1). This portrait has been portrayed while taking into account the representational nature of a painting. The depiction of a situation or a human being in the form of a painting works parallel as a form of literature which can be analyzed critically while taking into account the various perspectives (Andrews, 2012, p. 28). As the main focus of this research project is to unveil the troubled life of androgynous people, therefore, the this portrait is reflecting the combination of male as well as female body in order to present the true essence of the situation. The gender identity as well as gender expression of males having feminine traits cannot be categorized as male and female. The gender expression and gender identity of such people exist in in-between male and female identity. The traits and physical appearance of masculine and feminine behavior and actions in these special persons are overlapped because of one or more than one reasons. The border lines of gender identity as well as gender expression are blurred in the case of androgynous people (Bernard, 1974, p. 148). The amalgamation of masculine and feminine characteristics in a person works as a catalyst in terms of the creation of liminal spaces where such kinds of people are destined to confront various dilemmas. The social and cultural life style along with political and religious dimensions becomes fragmented where further propels the androgynous people into the dilemma of identity crisis. This dilemma of identity crisis leads towards some other sufferings in which the body and soul of these marginalized people get nothing but agonies (Hellum, 2018, p. 83). After getting an unequal treatment from the fellow society members, males having feminine traits or personality, as portrayed in the aforementioned painting, start questioning their existence in this world which ultimately results in disappointments and self-abuse.

The points given in the above paragraph are truly applicable on the figurative painting because it also exhibits as well as expresses the combination of feminine and masculine touch in a male human being (Hoffman, 1978, p. 16). This is a male body in terms of the gender as the hair, portrayed by the author, on the belly and its lower area is conveying this fact. This figurative painting is also of paramount importance regarding symbolic perspectives (Gratchen, 2020, p. 1). When the symbolic significance is considered then it can be observed that the variety of colors coupled with the presence of flowers is very much obvious. The portrait is a combination of male and feminine traits because the hair is the representation of masculine character, on the other hand, the presence of flowers or red rose¹ is the reflection of the female touch in the personality of this androgynous person (Deitch, 2019, p. 9). In this figurative painting, I have focused on the male beauty through the naked representation of body area which is above belly button. Here, at this point, it is crucial to state that the paintings which have been portrayed by me revolve around those males' members of Pakistani society who express feminine traits. Although they are fit males in terms of their sexuality, but they show feminine characteristics while speaking, acting, and physical appearance of their body (Gratchen, 2020, p. 1). The combination of male and female touch in one's body or physical appearance

becomes one of the major reasons due to which it become easy for the society to ridicule and torture him within the social and cultural working of their contemporary milieu (Gratchen, 2020, p. 1).

The physical appearance of body in the abovementioned portrait reflects the combination of male and female features. In this regard, it is pertinent to point out that it is a male body but the presence of rose or flower gives it a feministic touch. There are some symbolic representations in this portrait which make it a combination of male and female body. The representation of flower is depicted symbolically (Frownfelter, 2010, p. 1). The softness of flower represents the feminine traits in male body. The rose is used to express the similarity with females; therefore, I have used the rose to present the mixture of male and female body in this painting. In this painting, I have specifically focused on the beauty part of men which starts below the belly and ends near stomach area or belly button. As a matter of fact, the sensitivity of rose, as a feministic touch, is combined and has been presented as a part of those males who express feminine traits in terms of their body appearance.

Such males who possess feminine traits in their personality have been seen and observed as much more sensitive in Pakistani society. They do not have the capacity to bear even a mild humiliation from the other normal male members of society. They take themselves as inferior creatures as compared to the other normal males. This is the reason due to which they become the victim of inferiority complex. I have met some of such males and they have expressed that they believe that their body is not complete and something is missing from their body and physical appearance (Frownfelter, 2010, p. 1). According to such males, the lack of this ambiguity in their body in terms of clear gender expressions make them suffer among other normal males. As per my understanding about such males and their representation in my portraits, I take such androgynous male as a rose. I personally believe that such people are true males in the real essence of the word male because they are internally soft, honest and sensitive (Goody, 1993, p. 58). Sensitivity in one's personality make him humble and honest. Normal males can be also taken as roses. The petals reflect the sensitive and soft nature of males, on the other hand, the thorns around these petals are the representation of the hard work done by the male while living his social and economic life. These thorns are the difficulties and problems faced in the society (Goody, 1993, p. 58).

Here, it is necessary to discuss the wrong perception in our society. In the Pakistani society, it is believed that male should have some specific features in terms of speaking and behaving such as anger and attitude towards females. According to the traditional, social, cultural and religious aspects of Pakistani society, a female holds a great deal of importance as well as respect. I believe that the males who possess feminine traits should be accepted by the society members or the normal males (Goody, 1993, p. 58). Such androgynous people deserve more care and respect in the society because of the feminine traits in their personality. Such males possess dual power i.e., the power of males and females. Because of the presence of both male and female traits in androgynous people, it can be argued that such section of the society deserves more importance and status as compared to the normal males and females (Goody,

1993, p. 58). Unfortunately, the situation is entirely different as discussed and claimed above. Androgynous males because of the feminine traits are compelled to suffer from various kinds of problems.

The duality of gender traits works as a catalyst due to which they suffer from in-between situations (Lippard, 1978, p. 15). They are discriminated and unequally treated by the fellow members of society because of the ambiguity in their physical appearance. This is the situation where they have been seen as margins. They are ignored at different levels in terms of their social and cultural life style. The figurative painting portrayed by me explicitly reflects the in-between situation of androgynous males in Pakistani society. In the same way, it can be also claimed that because of the overlapping of masculine and feminine traits such males exist in a liminal space where nothing is obvious but vagueness and confusion (Lippard, 1978, p. 15). Androgynous males are continuously ignored in terms of economic point of views because the companies feel ashamed while hiring such people. This adds more sufferings in the economic life of such people.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes the critical discussion on the selected portrayed or painting with the exploration of the physical as well as spiritual marginalization of the males who are possessor of masculine and feminine traits at the same time. Figurative paintings fall in the category of visual art. The depiction of a situation or a human being in the form of a painting works parallel as a form of literature which can be analyzed critically while considering the various perspectives. The same has been done in this research project where the researcher has explored a painting while having a deep focus on their thematic and symbolic concerns. Androgynous males who possess feminine traits in their personality have been seen and observed as much more sensitive in Pakistani society. They become afraid of the public opinion and confine themselves to some specific place to avoid more humiliation. This figurative painting in this study has shared a great deal of similarity with the topic as well as analytical domain of the study.

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