



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Subversion of Traditional Feminine Stereotyped in Selected  
Pakistani Fiction**

Taimur Kayani <sup>1</sup> Hafiz Kamran Farooqi <sup>2</sup>

1. Senior Lecturer, Department of English, GIFT University, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan
2. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, GIFT University, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan

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**Corresponding**

**Author:**  
taimurkayani201  
1@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

This article investigates the subversion of traditional feminine stereotyped in the Selected Pakistani Fiction, *The Weary Generation* by Abdullah Hussain. Pakistani writers have always highlighted the struggle and oppression of women in a patriarchal society and represented as women as weak and obedient. However, this novel stands out among the traditional novels written in Pakistan. The selected novel influenced by western ideologies portrays women as independent and confident beings. The selected Pakistani Fiction examines the main female archetype and the socio-political atmosphere that gives them birth regarding women's autonomy and liberty. In this regard, Azra, the protagonist, subverts the traditional beliefs regarding the rights, freedom, tasks, and assignments of females in the patriarchal society. For discussion, Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* has been taken as a theoretical framework. Through this, it displays a ray of hope and opens new corridors for women's prosperity. The selected fiction is recommended for future researchers to identify the impact of western ideologies regarding female, gender, and sexuality in the Pakistani context

**Introduction**

The study highlights the subversion of traditional feminine stereotyped in selected Pakistani Fiction. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women have treated as an entity rather such a creature that spent their lives according to the will of their male representative of their families. Pakistan is a part of that area which is located in the sub-continent that has been known as 'Patriarchal Belt'. As the part of the sub-continent (now part of Pakistan), considered a patriarchal society where women lived under the domination of male members (Caldwell, 1982). Moghadam explains that life options for women are limited and away from

them i.e. health facilities, education, labour force, political participation, and skill development. They have limited resources even they get permission to visit and buy something from the nearby market. The sub-continent (now Pakistan, India, Bangladesh) and somehow, Afghanistan, are labeled as 'a culture against women' (2003).

In recent times, Eastern women especially those who belong to Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh assume as negative. They don't have any respect in the society and they misrepresent in western countries. In Islamic countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, women treat as submissive and oppressed and they don't have any respect in taking decisions regarding the issues/matters of family. In this regard, mass media has performed a vital role to produce such images of Eastern women (Macdonald, 2003).

In the era of British colonialism, Sidhwa raised voice in favour of Pakistani women rather wrote for the atrocities which have been done against women's rights. She portrays the image of Pakistani women in an artistic way that one can draw the caricature of patriarchal stereotyped women easily. In her works, most of the themes have been found regarding the oppression and tyranny that have been done against women in a patriarchal society. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sidhwa participated in several conventions and processions which have been organized by civil society regarding the rights of women (Arora, 2015).

Women are shown as a target of various forms of patriarchal oppression. In recent times, different writers such as Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, Talat Abbasi, Kamila Shamsie and Mohammed Hanif have directly as well as indirectly tackled the same concept in their fictions (Ahmed, 2009, p. 1). Most of these writers portray the character of Pakistani women who are being victimized by the circumstances of the post-colonization of the British in the subcontinent. Therefore, it is more like a response against what was happening during the former British colonies (p. 2).

Abdullah Hussein was the pen name of Muhammad Khan; he was born in 1931 in Rawalpindi, (now a part of Pakistan). He was an Urdu novelist, a short story writer and he wrote Urdu novel, *Udas Naslain* in 1963 and awarded for the prestigious *Adam Ji Award* in Pakistan. With the popularity, he translated it in an English version in 1999. Abdullah Hussein was a non-conventional and habitually wandering person. He did several jobs and visited many countries. After the publication of *Udas Naslain*, he went to the UK for a decade, where he ran a pub (Ghoshal, 2016, p. 1).

Abdullah Hussein wrote a novel titled *The Weary Generations (Udas Naslain)* in the background of post-colonialism. This paper exhibits the traditional feminine stereotyped in Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations* in the context of feminine mystique. In this regard, Friedan's feminine mystique has been taken as a variable to produce a vivid picture of the subversion of traditional feminine stereotyped.

In patriarchal Pakistani society, women are always forced to spend their lives for the sake of her family. They are bound down to pay household activities (Kesselman, 2001, p. 2). Fatima (2016) describes that *Then Weary Generations* deviates the traditional stereotyped feminine character and explores the opposite image of women. Azra, the protagonist of the novel limelight the subversion of a traditional feminine archetype. Abdullah Hussain introduces a female character i.e. Azra, unlike traditional Muslim women. By introducing such a liberal woman character, Abdullah Hussain breaks the stereotyped traditional Muslim women characters. Azra participated in politics and performed the role of rural women also. Her liberal attitude on religion, education, sex, and various other topics shock Naim, the protagonist of the story (p. 472).

### Literature Review

History has revealed that women are given lesser respect than men. They are considered inferior rather viewed as the unfeminine entity of pity and immoral. At various times, working women viewed as negligent mothers. Even at the workplace, they are not taken seriously by their immediate officers, colleagues, and society (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Heinz, Hendricks, & Martindale expresses that in a patriarchal society, women are expected to play different roles as mother and wife. To pay heed towards household works is considered the first and foremost duty of Pakistani women. If they give priority to fulfill other assignments then they are experienced feelings of selfishness or guilt (1982).

Conversely, in modern times the feminist movement has changed the vision of society and brings revolution. Nowadays, women get equality and freedom, but on the other hand, in the Pakistani scenario, a lot of criticism has been done by different segments of society. This concept of freedom earns a bad name for Pakistani women, even some intellectuals have not good opinions for working women at the workplace (Ahmed, 2013, p. 7). Rahman (2012) argued that in the last phase of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional stereotyped women took a step forward and joined liberal women in life i.e. bold, strong and confident women, etc. (p. 108).

Liberal feminist theories are considered to be contrastive to the social moral values of other cultures (Braidotti, 2016, p. 4). Pakistani feminism which separates itself from western philosophy is derived from religious, cultural, and social influence on society (Mohanty, 1988, p. 334). Farhat Jabeen, one of the famous Pakistani writers, once said in her writing that "It is believed that the international effort to promote women's rights in the name of human rights is considered anti-Islamic" (Ali, Jabeen, & Rahat, 2011, p. 160). Pakistan women are developing themselves as a self-autonomous, intellectually free and independent being. In discussions about traditional family systems, the role of mother and her position is disparaged by liberal ideologies which are criticized by also western thinkers and Pakistani intellectuals (Braidotti, 2016, p. 6).

## Research Gap

Naeem presents a brief overview of *The Weary Generations*, "It has been studied on three different levels: a love letter to Punjab in which he describes different ceremonies customs and traditions of Punjabi Milieu, a love story of Naim and Azra, and anecdotes which revolve on the partition of India" (2016, p. 435).

Similarly, Hussein's daughter Fatima asserts that in *The Life and Times of Abdullah Hussein* "the actual writing of *The Weary Generations* come about 'out of sheer boredom' when Abdullah Hussein was posted at Daudkhel as part of a team-up a cement factory". To strengthen the argument, Fatima reveals to the audience about the lifestyle of famous Urdu novelist Abdullah Hussein that he was always worried about the worse condition and felt pains after observing the condition of Pakistani people. On this occasion, she says that he tries to make the best to solve the problems of others rather than their religions. In this way, Hussein earns the label of 'Anti-Pakistani'. Likewise, Hussein talks about the generations that get Pakistan but do not know how to use their resources and how to take care of the country (2016, p. 433).

Iqbal commences that Azra has a political background, so, she wishes to participate in Delhi's politics as follows:

She is a representative of the bourgeois class, which has only one goal: personal glory. Her participation in the Independence Movement is devoid of any commitment. She wants to get her pictures published in the newspapers. Her family likes to 'discuss politics' in the drawing-room in a philosophical way. They are true examples of philistinism. Their ideas and goals come from the colonial masters. (1985, p. 34)

Moreover, *Beyond Weary Generations* discusses that Hussein's English version, *The Weary Generations* is as popular as the Urdu version, *UdasNaslain*. This novel explores several themes of life i.e. war, a partition of the subcontinent, love, and struggle for life. Four generations are affected by the influence of the novel. This seems that its title is symbolic and describes several shades of life, such as the political chaos, worse condition, disturbs the peace of the society. He uses simple diction and introduces short sentences as well as borrows some Punjabi words. Further, he says that the former President, Ayyub Khan bits of advice to Hussein to write 'QaumiKitabain' instead of melancholic literary works and has dealt with two topics i.e. politics and cunning forces in *The Weary Generations*. Along with this, the story reveals the disturbances between political history and colonial societies. In this way, Naeem produces some resistance against colonialism. In a review, Ghoshal(2016)portrays a picture of Muslim migration and harsh realities of the partition of Indo-Pak 1947 in *The Partition through the Eyes of One of Pakistan's Greatest Writers*.

The previous studies lack in exploring subversion of traditional feminine stereotyped through the specific lens feminine mystique in Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*.It fills the gap by investigating the character of Azra, the

protagonist of the novel. She belongs to the elite class but she engages with a villager Naim. Throughout the story, she tries her best to subvert the traditional feminine stereotyped. In the background of the literature review, this current research fills the gap by providing subversion traditional feminine stereotyped in Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*.

### **Methodology**

This portion of the study deals with research design and an appropriate theoretical framework regarding the research project. The design of the study is qualitative, content-based analysis, and explorative. The researcher has analyzed the sample of text via an in-depth study of the selected text. The researcher becomes able to limelight the hidden meanings of the text.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To seek these inter-related objectives, which have been designed in the first section, this research project utilizes Friedan's notion of feminine mystique as a theoretical framework to analyze the text minutely. The end of the 1960s was the beginning of the Women's Liberation Movement (Friedan, 2010, p. 2). It was essentially an examination of political and social roles for women in middle-class America. It holds the idea that women are not happy with the role of mother and housewife alone (Appleby, 2015, p. 1).

The first few lines of Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique* describes the daily life of a typical American woman in 1960s:

The problem lay buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts, and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night-she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question- 'Is this all?'(Friedan, 2010, p. 15).

Her personal experience as a housewife that evoked her to write about restrictions and limitations that confined women into the fore wall. By writing this book, Friedan wants to awaken the psychology of women that there is something more than the duties and tasks of household works. Friedan believed that women lose their full potential and confidence when they were limited to only several jobs that were "acceptable" for women (Nicolson, 1993, p. 6).

Friedan discusses that women give up their dreams and career to become housewives and then after some time find themselves unsatisfied with their role as a housewife. She argues that this problem is 'the problem that has no name'(2010, p.

15). She further says that this unhappiness is inevitable when women are not concerned about their individuality and stay under the confines of the feminine mystique (p. 16).

Moreover, Friedan explores the unhappiness of women who are encouraged to be only housewives, mothers, and wives. She explores the idea that women who perform the role of homemaker and housewife prevent them from their achievement and success. She further elaborates that "The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their femininity . . ." (2010, p. 43). She further says that women get satisfaction through marriage, being a mother, and doing household things but later in life, she finds herself incomplete and alienated. She wants to liberate women to achieve their goals according to her are more important than domestic life and is beyond the four walls of a house (2010, p.44).

## **Discussion**

This research article intends to examine the subversion of traditional feminine mystique in Pakistani Selected Fiction i.e. *The Weary Generations* in the sub-continent context. Pakistani writers make up the mind to design the role of women as oppressed and exploited by the male members in the patriarchal society. After World War II, western ideology dominates the whole sub-continent and due to the heavy influence of western ideology, Pakistani writers subvert the traditional stereotyped image of women and transform them into modern women. Now, women get equal opportunities for jobs, freedom, and liberty as male representatives have in society. Azra, the protagonist, performs the same role in the Pakistani selected fiction and presents a picture of liberal women. This research project indicates Azra's role as active, assertive, bold, courageous women, as she takes in social and political activities in the selected fiction.

This portion analyses how she makes efforts to subvert the stereotyped concept of women and produces a new concept regarding the role of Eastern women. Most probably, it has been observed the Eastern women have to perform the role of household woman i.e. role of wife and mother. She is forced to spend her life under the thumb of a male member of the family. Along with this, she is confined in the four walls of the house, and not permitted her to go out lonely and visit nearby markets. Azra, the protagonist, shows a rebellious attitude towards her gender role rather than the traditional feminist role which has been imposed on her by the patriarchal society. She subverts the idea of traditional stereotyped women in the selected fiction.

This article investigates Azra's character, the protagonist, in the Pakistani Selected Fiction *The Weary Generations*. The study categorizes the discussion into two sections i.e. social context and political background. First of all, this research is going to limelight the social aspect of the character Azra in *The Weary Generations*.

## **Social Aspect**

This part of the study explains the social aspect of the subversion of the traditional stereotyped feminine, Azra. In this episode, she performs the role of a ghost in her house, Roshan Mahal. A party is to be celebrated in the honour of her father, where she engages herself with the male guests and makes gossips with them fearlessly. Although she belongs to Eastern family she violates the stereotyped traditional feminist perspective. The male characters in the Pakistani context are engaged in organizing parties, arrange ceremonies and processions but after getting the influence of western ideologies, the female side also contributes to organizing parties and other ceremonies. In Roshan Mahal, Azra, the protagonist of the selected fiction looks aggressive and assertive; she is busy to welcome the guests as well as directs the servants to decorate the things in a well decorative way. She did not feel fear rather show calmness and confidence in confronting Naim while asking him to participate in the Dastarbandi ceremony.

Conversely, there is a restriction on the women in the Pakistani context that they do not dare to talk with guests and even strangers. Contrary to this, in a dialogue, she asks Naim, the protagonist, why are you keep quiet here? This assertive tone shows the courageous and frank attitude of Azra with Naim. Her character jumps towards the other side and performs the role of liberal women in a patriarchal society. During the conversation, it seems that she becomes assertive, and, in this way, she looks mocking at the traditional feminine perspective of Eastern women and shows the boldness by subverting the old beliefs regarding liberty and wisdom of Eastern women.

Similarly, Azra asks Naim, a peasant; have you any Western clothes for a party? She does not feel any hostility rather talks with Naim with full confidence. This dialogue displays the intimacy between Azra and Naim. This dialogue portrays the social interaction between female and male characters. This conversation highlights the daring attitude of Azra that how she allures Naim stealthily without getting permission from her parents. There should be an invitation from the male member of Azra's family but here, the picture is different. Azra subverts the stereotyped traditions and invites Naim at the ceremony of her brother passing his BA on the behalf of her father. She dares to invite even a stranger and performs the character of her father. This intention of Azra not only slaps on elite class but also violates the set old traditions of the society in the Pakistani context.

In the same way, Azra performs the role of convener and arranges a tea party. In it, all the cousins and relatives have been invited. Male and female are gathered and celebrated picnic party. The gathering of males and females in the tea party shatters the traditional way of thinking. Thereafter, Lydia, cousin of Azra, gave a proposal that they enjoy tea parties in a grassy lawn outside of the shadow. All are agreed, go out in a grassy lawn to enjoy the tea party with its real sense

Azra advances and greetings Naim grips his hand confidently and takes him to one corner of the room. In this way, she enjoys the company of Naim without getting permission and giving notice to her elders. This meeting indicates that how much she is influenced, confident, and fearless in the patriarchal society. It seems that they enjoy the picnic party together without any restrictions. This mood of thinking displays the transformation of Pakistani society in the selected fiction.

Besides, Azra takes the role of advisor in the Pakistani context in the selected fiction. Times and again, she performs the role of advisor whether advice to her father, brother or even strangers. A ceremony has been organized in the Roshan Mahal. People have been invited to this from different segments of society. Meanwhile, Azra enters the guestroom of her house and asks Naim what have you been doing today? He answered, sleeping, upon it, she advises Naim to take a bath and joins them because all members of a family are awaited to you. Interestingly, there is a love knot between Azra and Naim, the peasant, who comes here to attend the Dastarbandi ceremony with his uncle. Abdullah Hussain introduces brave female characters in the story of the selected fictional though there is a fashion of subjugated female characters in the Pakistani context. There is a tradition in the Pakistani context that nobody is allowed to meet with females until they get married. Over here, Azra and Naim attempt to change the custom and want to subvert the old stereotyped idea about marriage.

Furthermore, she challenges the old traditional idea of marriage and kicks off the old way of selecting the bridegroom. Although she earns ill repute for her family she remains to fix with her intention. Along with this, she has a firm determination to choose a husband for herself whether the circumstances go in her favour or not. This practice highlights the subversion of the stereotyped traditional feminine perspective. Over here, Azra and her Khala, are engaged in a dialogue, her Khala satirizes on her love match. She argues that her decision about marriage brings agony and destruction for her family, particularly, her father Roshan Agha. She further says that you refused a perfect match with Waheed a year ago for a peasant. Azra annoyed at this, instantly says that don't call him a peasant. It seems that she goes against the sweet will of her father and selects a peasant as a husband. In this way, she rebels against the set tradition of patriarchy as well as slaps on the face of capitalist society. She has the same traits as male members of society have in the patriarchal society. She performs the role of male and enjoys the same rights, as she rejects the proposal of Waheed.

Similarly, when he comes back from the war and meet her at her home. at this occasion, Naim grips Azra's hand and apologizes for his attitude. When she speaks, her tone is clear and sound even without a shiver. On the other hand, she had feelings but did not display them before him. In every situation, whether the circumstances are in the favour or not, the Eastern woman is bound to happy in the happiness of her family and remains silent. This social interaction shows that she looks happy and remains faithful to him. In this discussion, Azra looks brave and confident and alleges that whether the circumstances are good or bad, she has to display tender feelings for others especially, Naim. Moreover, her tone becomes assertive and authoritative.

## Political Glimpses

Subversion of a traditional feminine can be seen in the character of Azra under the perspective of political activities in the Pakistani Selected Fiction. In the Pakistani context, there is a fashion that the writers portray women as oppressive and subjugated in a patriarchal society. Over time, this color of society has become faded and the westerns ideology grips Pakistani society. Now, the writers introduce bold female characters that they decide with their own accord. In this way, women go against the old belief and set their own goals, dreams, and spend their lives with full contentment. They not only participate in politics but also perform different roles in the political field. Azra's character performs multifarious roles in the selected fiction.

Azra and Naim are busy in discussing the politics of the country and talks about Desai sisters. Interestingly, Azra tells Naim that she meets with Desai sisters in Delhi. This shows that women take part in political discussion without any restriction. Along with this, she not only meets with political figures but also comments or criticizes the political incidents as well. During this conversation, she asks Naim do you know about Jallianwala Bagh incident, Khilafat movement, and Rowlett Act. This means that she keeps vigilant eyes on the political scene. She reads the newspaper daily so; she has pieces of information about each and everything of society. This aspect of participation in social and political issues shows wisdom, the intellect of Azra's character. On the contrary, women have to live in the fore wall of a house and fulfill all household responsibilities. Now, modern women are free from all restrictions and decide with own accord without any social pressure. Discussion on political issues highlights Azra's wisdom and understanding of politics. Over here, Azra subverts the feminine stereotyped in the selected Pakistani fiction.

Similarly, participation as an observer in the inquiry committee for investigating the incident of Jallianwala Bagh shows the subversion of stereotyped beliefs regarding the assignments and interests of women in a patriarchal society. This participation describes the importance of women's wisdom, freedom, and liberty. Women can be seen as free in choosing their field of works in the selected fiction. Indian National Congress forms an inquiry committee to probe the incident of Jallianwala Bagh and Azra and Naim are included in the inquiry committee as an observer. Through this, one can imagine that the importance of women's opinions in the political field. Azra is pleased to see her name and photograph in the newspaper as being the female observer of the congress inquiry committee.

The discussion highlights the significance of women regarding participation in the social and political field in Pakistani selected fiction. Pakistani writers bring bold, and courageous female representatives in their literary works. The traditional belief about the assignments of women has transformed. Now, Pakistani women get equal opportunities for jobs, freedoms, and liberty in the society, and Azra has performed different roles in Pakistani selected fiction i.e. *The Weary Generations*. Azra has performed the role of host, advisor, lover, a politician and observer in the inquiry

committee. Azra's various roles highlight the significance and wisdom of women in Pakistani selected fiction.

### **Conclusion**

This study on the selected fiction, *The Weary Generation* strengthens the belief of liberal feminism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century visible in representing female characters. In this era, the concept of oppression and struggle of women becomes a fashion, and there is a dire need to break this traditional stereotyped belief and set a foundation of such a society where female gender can enjoy equal values and worth. Pakistani authors have limelight the oppression and struggle of women in their works so that with time they can change this traditional belief and portray the women's characters as liberal, confident, and assertive. A few narrow-minded people are still ranked females as inferior and subordinate entities in a patriarchal society. To this extent, Hussain produces Azra's character as independent and assigns to her multifarious roles in the selected text, so that the female gender can enjoy the same status in the society.

Friedan challenges this old belief in the feminine mystique and lays down a foundation of such a society where everyone regardless of gender and identity, is free to pursue their dreams and passions. In this way, she thinks that women should be given the liberty and freedom to develop fully as an independent being from their homes and families. By carrying the same idea, Hussain produces Azra's character in the text, where she wants to live independently from all those assignments which have been commonly associated with the Eastern woman. Azra's rejects the very notion of old traditional feminine perspective by performing different roles such as the role of host, a convenor, advisor, socialist, gardener, and participation in political activities in the novel. Subversion of traditional stereotyped feminine can be seen in Azra's character in each perspective.

Moreover, the traditional concept regarding the liberty and worth of women challenges in all the aspects of Azra's life. This study discusses the social and political aspects of the protagonist, Azra. To this extent, she subverts the old belief regarding the tasks and assignments of females in the patriarchal society. In this phase, she gets equal status as the male gender has. She plays multifarious roles like a host, organizer of parties, an advisor, a lover, participation in games. Along with this, she takes part in freedom movements, as an observer in an inquiry committee, and political activities. One can see that she looks in the novel to fulfill her dreams and desires even though she lives in a patriarchal society. In this regard, she gets equal status and rights and spends her life confidently against the male gender in society.

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