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**Upturned Moustaches and Manufactured Manhood: A Study of
Hegemonic Masculinity in Tariq Rehman's *Moustache***



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Abstract

This study explores the construction and performance of masculinity in *Moustache* by Tariq Rehman through the theoretical lens of hegemonic masculinity as developed by R. W. Connell. While previous scholarship has interpreted the story through postcolonial paradigms such as mimicry and subalternity, this paper argues that the narrative fundamentally dramatizes the production, regulation, and humiliation of masculine identity within a rural Punjabi power structure. The moustache operates as a symbolic marker of hegemonic masculinity, linking honor, authority, class, and bodily discipline. Through qualitative textual analysis, this study demonstrates how Allah Dad (Dadu) and Shafaqat attempt to perform dominant masculinity but are repeatedly subordinated within shifting hierarchies of power. The findings reveal that masculinity in the story is neither natural nor stable; rather, it is socially constructed, policed, and violently enforced.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, Masculinity Studies, Power, Symbolism, Rural Hierarchy, Identity Performance, Tariq Rehman

1. Background of the Study

Moustache by Tariq Rehman (1989) portrays rural Punjabi society, where honor, prestige, and masculinity are closely tied to the physical symbol of the moustache. Earlier studies (Tyson, 2011; Pandey & Mohammadi, 2022) have largely interpreted the story through postcolonial frameworks, emphasizing mimicry, colonial consciousness, and subalternity. While these approaches illuminate the colonial context and social hierarchies, they limit the analysis to colonial discourse and underexplore the gendered dimensions of power.

Masculinity studies, particularly R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (1995), offer a more nuanced lens to understand the story. Connell posits that masculinity is not a fixed biological trait but a social construct, organized within power relations that legitimize dominance and subordinate alternative masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is the culturally exalted form of masculinity that establishes ideals of male behavior, authority, and bodily display, which are upheld through social approval, coercion, and symbolic recognition.

Further, scholars such as Judith Butler (1990) highlight gender as performative, emphasizing that masculine identity is enacted through repeated stylized acts; Michael Kimmel (2008) explores masculinity as a competitive, homosocial performance among men; and Pierre Bourdieu (2001) theorizes symbolic capital as the social and cultural recognition that legitimizes authority. In *Moustache*, the moustache functions as symbolic capital and becomes a visible performance of hegemonic masculinity, structuring social interactions, enforcing hierarchy, and representing masculine honor in the village.

2. Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the operation of hegemonic masculinity in *Moustache* (Rehman, 1989) and to explore how masculine identity is constructed, performed, and regulated in rural Punjabi society. It examines the mechanisms through which hegemonic masculinity is expressed, enforced, and challenged in the narrative, focusing on the moustache as a symbolic representation of masculine power, honor, and authority. The study investigates how the protagonists, Dadu and Shafaqat, perform, internalize, and negotiate hegemonic masculine ideals, highlighting the intersections of masculinity with class, physical strength, and institutional authority. By applying Connell's (1995) framework, the study moves beyond postcolonial interpretations to foreground the gendered hierarchies that shape both individual and collective identity in Rehman's narrative.

3. Theoretical Framework: Hegemonic Masculinity

This paper applies R. W. Connell (1995)'s hegemonic masculinity that represents the culturally dominant ideal of manhood, which subordinates other masculinities and is maintained through a combination of consent and coercion, relying on symbolic authority and social approval. Connell further identifies four relational forms of masculinity: hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized. In Tariq Rahman's *Moustache* (1989), the Chaudhry embodies hegemonic masculinity, Dadu represents marginalized masculinity constrained by class and social position, while Shafaqat oscillates between aspirations toward hegemonic status and experiences of subordination. Masculinity in the narrative is publicly displayed, visibly performed, competitive, and often violently enforced.

4. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach, focusing on a close reading of selected passages from *Moustache* (Rehman, 1989). By applying R. W. Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity, the analysis examines how masculinity is socially constructed, performed, and enforced in rural Punjabi society. The research is descriptive and interpretive in nature, aiming to understand how gendered hierarchies are reflected in the characters' behavior, physical appearance, and social interactions (Butler, 1990; Bourdieu, 2001). This method allows for a detailed exploration of the symbolic meaning of the moustache as a marker of masculine authority and the ways in which masculinity is regulated through class, institutional authority, and communal surveillance (Kimmel, 2008).

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section analyzes *Moustache* by Tariq Rahman (1989) through the theoretical framework of **hegemonic masculinity** as developed by R. W. Connell (1995), while incorporating insights from Judith Butler (1990) and Michel Foucault (1977). Each subsection presents textual evidence from Rahman (1989) and interprets it through the relevant theoretical lens.

5.1 The Moustache as Symbol of Hegemonic Masculinity

Rahman (1989) writes:

“For the moustache and the turban had a way of becoming all one and somehow connected with honor.”

This statement establishes the moustache as inseparable from honor and masculine prestige. The moustache is not described as biological hair but as a cultural marker of dignity and authority. Within the village's symbolic economy, it functions as visible masculine legitimacy.

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally exalted form of masculinity that legitimizes male dominance and subordinates alternative masculinities. In Rahman's (1989) narrative, only the Chaudhrys; the landowning elite possess the socially sanctioned “right” to large, upturned moustaches. The moustache thus operates as an embodied sign of hegemonic masculinity.

The connection between turban and moustache further amplifies this symbolism. Both signify patriarchal honor, lineage, and class power. Therefore, the moustache functions as a cultural institution of masculinity rather than a personal style.

5.2 Dadu's Performance of Masculinity

Rahman (1989) describes:

“Allah Dad started growing his moustaches... He was a strapping youth of twenty...” Dadu’s physical strength and athletic dominance represent idealized rural masculinity. However, masculinity in Connell’s (1995) framework is hierarchical. Although Dadu embodies physical vigor, he lacks structural authority due to his Kammi class background.

Dadu explicitly equates masculinity with visible display:

“But I will see to it that I keep a moustache as a man should. I will be a man” (Rahman, 1989).

The phrase “as a man should” signals normative expectations. Masculinity is not inherent but socially regulated. Here, Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity becomes relevant. Butler argues that gender identity is constituted through repeated stylized acts. Dadu’s growing and grooming of the moustache becomes a repeated masculine performance aimed at securing recognition.

However, Connell (1995) distinguishes between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities. Dadu’s masculinity remains marginalized because it lacks economic capital and institutional authority. His bodily performance cannot override structural hierarchy.

5.3 Masculine Policing and Discipline

Rahman (1989) writes:

“Before long the Chaudhry accosted Dadu and told him to cut off his moustache.”

This moment marks the policing of competing masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity must eliminate symbolic rivals in order to maintain dominance (Connell, 1995). The Chaudhry perceives Dadu’s moustache as a threat to established hierarchy.

The violence intensifies:

“They cut off his moustache and... stuffed it in his mouth” (Rahman, 1989).

This act constitutes symbolic emasculation. The moustache, a source of pride, is transformed into humiliation. Connell (1995) argues that hegemonic masculinity

sustains itself through the subordination of other masculinities. Dadu's public humiliation demonstrates this mechanism.

Additionally, this episode aligns with Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power. The body becomes a site of control. The forced shaving disciplines Dadu's physical identity, reasserting hierarchical order. The public nature of the act ensures that masculine hierarchy is visibly restored.

Thus, hegemonic masculinity is maintained not merely through consent but through violence.

5.4 Masculinity and Class Hierarchy

Rahman (1989) explicitly connects class and masculinity:

“They don’t like to see Kammis like us going around sporting huge moustaches.”

This statement reveals that masculinity is class-bound. Not all men are permitted access to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995) explains that marginalized masculinities emerge when men are excluded from full masculine privilege due to class, race, or ethnicity.

Dadu's identity as a Kammi restricts his masculine mobility. Despite physical strength and personal confidence, he cannot legitimately claim hegemonic masculinity because he lacks land ownership and inherited prestige.

Therefore, masculinity in *Moustache* operates within economic hierarchy. It is structurally regulated rather than individually achieved.

5.5 Shafaqat: Military Masculinity

Shafaqat seeks an alternative route to masculine prestige:

“I’ll join the army... and I’ll have long, black, upturned moustaches” (Rahman, 1989).

The army symbolizes institutionalized masculinity discipline, uniformity, posture, and authority. Connell (1995) identifies military institutions as central sites for producing hegemonic masculinity.

When Shafaqat returns in uniform, the villagers describe him as:

“Our own Hercules...” (Rahman, 1989).

The mythological comparison elevates him to heroic masculinity. However, Rahman (1989) undercuts this illusion:

“He was the commanding officer’s stick-orderly...”

Despite the uniform, Shafaqat remains subordinate within military hierarchy. His masculinity is context-dependent. While celebrated in the village, he remains structurally inferior in the army.

This demonstrates Connell's (1995) argument that hegemonic masculinity is relational and hierarchical, even within institutions that produce it.

5.6 Collapse of Masculine Illusion

Rahman (1989) concludes with an image that destabilizes heroic masculinity:

“His huge moustache was hardly visible as he washed clothes.”

The moustache once a symbol of dominance loses its visibility and symbolic power. Shafaqat transitions from martial heroism to domestic servitude.

Connell (1995) emphasizes that hegemonic masculinity is not fixed but contextually produced and sustained through recognition. Without the village gaze, Shafaqat's masculinity collapses.

The narrative thus exposes hegemonic masculinity as fragile and situational. It depends on surveillance, hierarchy, and social acknowledgment. When removed from these structures, its symbolic markers lose authority.

Discussion

Through Dadu and Shafaqat, Rahman (1989) demonstrates that masculinity is socially constructed, rather than biologically determined (Connell, 1995), and is performed through repeated stylized acts, such as grooming and displaying the moustache, which constitute masculine identity (Butler, 1990). Masculinity in the story is also class-regulated, as economic and social hierarchies limit access to hegemonic authority (Connell, 1995), and it is maintained through bodily discipline, public humiliation, and coercion, reflecting structural enforcement of power (Foucault, 1977). Moreover, masculine identity is contextually unstable, shifting with changes in social, institutional, and familial circumstances (Connell, 1995). In this framework, the upturned moustache functions as the central metaphor for hegemonic masculinity an ideal sustained through hierarchy, surveillance, and violence revealing that Rahman's *Moustache* critiques the theatrical fragility and structural injustice embedded in culturally exalted forms of masculinity.

In *Moustache* (1989), Tariq Rahman presents masculinity as a socially constructed and culturally regulated identity rather than a biological given. Masculine authority in

the narrative is defined through communal recognition, visible display, and adherence to socially sanctioned norms. The moustache functions as symbolic capital a public marker of honor, prestige, and male legitimacy through which hegemonic masculinity is embodied and performed. However, access to this dominant masculinity is restricted by class hierarchy, as economically and socially marginalized men are denied full participation in masculine power structures. The text further demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity is maintained through violence, humiliation, and disciplinary practices that subordinate competing masculinities. While institutional spaces such as the military offer temporary empowerment and symbolic elevation, such authority remains conditional and hierarchically structured. Ultimately, the narrative exposes masculine identity as unstable, context-dependent, and sustained through social validation rather than inherent strength, revealing hegemonic masculinity to be fragile and vulnerable to shifts in power.

7. Conclusion

Through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, *Moustache* emerges as a profound exploration of masculine anxiety, power performance, and symbolic domination. Dadu and Shafaqat strive to embody culturally exalted manhood through their moustaches, yet both are subordinated within broader hierarchies. The story demonstrates that masculinity is performed, regulated, competitive and violently enforced.

Ultimately, Rehman exposes the fragility of hegemonic masculinity and critiques the cultural obsession with visible markers of honor. The moustache, once a symbol of pride, becomes a symbol of humiliation and illusion.

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Authors' Contribution

¹**Dr. Syeda Sadaf Munir Kazmi** (Assistant Professor of English, Alhamd Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan) conceptualized the research study, developed the theoretical framework, supervised the analytical process, and critically reviewed and refined the manuscript for intellectual content.

²**Dr. Ishaq Khan** (Associate Professor of English, Government Postgraduate College, Nowshera, Pakistan) contributed to the research design and methodology, guided the data analysis, and provided substantial revisions to strengthen the argumentation and academic rigor of the study.

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All authors read, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to its submission for publication.