



## Shameen from Haseena Moin's *Kohar*: A Melancholic Character in Mist

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### Abstract

This paper analyses Shameen, the lead character of Haseena Moin's (1991) mini-serial *Kohar*, in light of Sigmund Freud's theory of melancholia and argues that as someone who loses an object of love, suffers ambivalence, is haunted by past experiences, disregards her ego and goes through a mania, she proves herself to be a melancholic character as per Freud's theory. The paper also sheds light on how and why Shameen's character is shaped by the 'past', unlike the writer's other female protagonists whose efforts are always for a better 'future', and what the deeply evocative title '*Kohar*' (mist) and the setting of the play suggest about Shameen's bleak future. The paper offers an insight into a post-Zia era dismal regime that changed women in multiple ways, in terms of their character, their participation in practical life and their emotional sensitivity. This research thus lies at the intersection of psychoanalysis and feminist studies and tangentially touches upon environmental literature to see why a popular dramatist, at a certain juncture in Pakistan's history, chose to sketch a character markedly different from her other characters, and what she hoped to achieve by placing her in suburban Karachi rather than in the heart of the bustling metropolis, and why her melancholic female character failed to appeal to the masses unlike her more vivacious female characters residing in Urban Karachi.

**Key Terms:** melancholia, ambivalence, ego, past, mania, atmospheric sensitivity, female melancholia

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## Introduction

This paper argues that Shameen, the protagonist of Haseena Moin's drama serial *Kohar*, is a character suffering from melancholia, as she possesses and exhibits all the traits that, according to Sigmund Freud, are characteristic of melancholic people. By bringing an unpopular dramatic work into the academic domain, it also attempts to see if the failure of *Kohar* as a television production, resulting in a 'melancholic' female character not getting the viewers' sympathy it deserved, can be traced back to the socio-political workings of the time. Shameen from *Kohar* never received the same attention as Sana from *Ankahi* or Zoya from *Dhoop Kinare*, two female characters from Pakistan Television that left an everlasting impact on the viewers' minds. Shameen's character or her association with a partly rural and foggy environment has never been the subject of discussion, whether in informal public gatherings or academic settings.

*Kohar*, a Urdu language drama serial comprising six episodes, aired in 1991 on Pakistan Television. Written by Haseena Moin and starring Marina Khan as the protagonist, it is a story of a young girl named Shameen who resides with her paternal grandmother in a mansion on the outskirts of Karachi, where her father comes to meet her only during his breaks from work as a pilot. While striving to remain gleeful despite having a dead mother and an ignorant father, Shameen has her bouts of depression, depicted visually in the serial through scenes that have the protagonist standing before moist windows, walking on dry leaves, or sitting beside streams. Shameen's attempts to escape the demands of a young man in love with her backfire when she lies to him that the girl he had seen and fallen in love with at first sight was her twin sister, who, in reality, does not even exist. Shameen starts posing as Sharmeen, her imaginary twin, and this farce gradually assumes serious proportions and escalates into a full-blown predicament for the girl when the man discovers the truth and decides to leave her forever.

Haseena Moin's Shameen deserves special critical attention because, ironically enough, it is a character that has remained somewhat eclipsed in comparison to the popular dramatist's more headstrong and bubbly female characters. Not only is the character a forgotten one, but the drama itself did not reach the top of the charts. At the same time, the very name of Haseena Moin, especially before the 2000s, was a celebrated phenomenon, to the extent that the Indian media industry also reached out to the dramatist to write one film and two dramas for it. Shameen from *Kohar* is observed not only as a girl in melancholia, but also as one who instead of being found at the centre of the bustling city of Karachi as is the case with Moin's other female protagonists, is put at the fringes of the city, where again, unlike the dramatist's previously written female characters, she does not practically participate in the city life. The research problem, however, does not only lie in *Kohar's* not procuring popularity, but also in the question of why a melancholic female character amidst misty settings has not been able to attract people. In contrast, the same writers' characters by the names of Sana and Zoya are still remembered for their happy-go-lucky personalities who would always look at the bright side of things, confidently work alongside men in the city, and also choose their partners themselves from the sphere of the very practical life they have been a part of.

The research questions pertain to how and 'why' Shameen is melancholic, and what accounts for the writer's desire to portray a female lead who dwells in her past, just a few years after Zia ul Haq's regime. Why did Moin create rebellious female characters during Zia's regime but not after it, and why did she place the characters at the outskirts of Karachi? How is the choice of time and place connected to the depiction of female sadness? What does the title and the setting of the drama, coupled with Shameen's melancholia, say about women's future in the immediate aftermath of Zia's military regime?

*Kohar* remains completely ignored in scholarly research or general articles on Haseena Moin's craft. Analytical pieces on the writer's drama serials generally focus on her strikingly valiant women protagonists, who are then looked at from a socio-historical lens. Only Sehar Mughal, in her paper titled talks about Moin's female characters trying to establish their place in an orthodox society, which may give them a chance to work outside home, but "with the ever-present values of family and relationships retaining their importance" (47). The character Mughal focuses on is Zara from *Tanhaiyan*, who "pursues her career and financial goals passionately," but when she goes beyond the limits prescribed by society, "is punished by paralysis and pulled back into the domestic sphere to be cared for by her family and friends" (Mughal, 46). Although Zara is also one such character whose moods can be subjected to academic scrutiny, psychoanalysis does not serve as a framework to analyse Moin's otherwise famous characters.

Even though the women of Haseena Moin may not have been critically examined from the perspective of atmospheric sensitivity or female association with the environment, the female protagonist of Pakistani director Sabiha Sumar's film *Khamosh Pani* does receive critical attention in Shazia Rahman's work. Rahman sees the protagonist's act of committing suicide as one of bravery, in her effort to connect with the land she associates herself with. "Ayesha is an eco-cosmopolitan because she chooses to stay in the same village her whole life ... and when she jumps in the well at the end, the extreme long shot makes it appear as if she is entering the land and joining her mother and sister in an act of eco-cosmopolitan female solidarity" (Rahman 34). As can be seen, Rahman makes a connection between the woman and the land, not between the woman and the aerial atmosphere, and also seems to establish Ayesha as a character that is psychoanalytically strong (not vulnerable) in the face of socio-political chaos she has witnessed throughout her life (both 1947 and religious fundamentalism during Zia's regime).

This is the maximum academic attention a Pakistani screen character has received in the scholarship available in these domains. Justine Pizzo introduces us to female psychoanalytical characterisation in connection with atmospherics, but again, her focus is on English women, and Pakistani women continue to be eclipsed in this regard. It is the character of Jane Eyre that Pizzo focuses on in her article, arguing that "Jane's affinity with the air which her family name evokes and constitutes her atmospheric exceptionalism, or sensual and intellectual receptivity to climate" (84).

The research gap that this paper attempts to fill is greater attention to the psychological behaviour of on-screen female characters of Pakistan, especially in response to their environment.

## **Theoretical Framework: Psychoanalysis, Melancholia, and Ecological Aesthetics**

A significant part of this research borrows its theoretical tools from Sigmund Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia," published in 1917. There are specific terms provided by the psychoanalyst, such as "ambivalence", "lost object of love", "disregarding of ego", and "mania", which describe the condition of melancholic people and thus help place the character under scrutiny in light of a solid framework. While Freud's idea of melancholia has been widely criticised, it nonetheless provides a nuanced theoretical understanding of the character in question, as the entire narrative appears to align with Freud's knowledge of melancholia. Alongside providing a psychoanalytical understanding of Shameen's character, this research also merges psychology and atmospheric studies by bringing to the fore the idea of "ecological aesthetics" as expounded on by Gabriele Gambaro in his article of the same name to argue that Shameen's psychology and her environment go hand in hand. The two theories serve as a collective framework to help find an answer to why Shameen is the way she is. Following that is a discussion on why a melancholic character set amidst a misty setting makes its way to television screens after a dictatorial regime. The research content thus moves in the following manner; an attempt at establishing the protagonist of *Kohar* as a melancholic one, then studying her environment to argue that the atmosphere has shaped her character to a large extent, followed by a final probing into why a female character is moved into a misty, rural space and made to get psychologically disturbed following the ending of a regime not considered propitious for women.

### **Melancholia**

The very title of *Kohar* exudes bleakness and uncertainty, the word having originated from Sanskrit, translates into English as "Mist". Its presence in the titular picture, showing Marina Khan standing alone with puffs of fog engulfing her, also suggests that the serial's storyline will not be a "feel-good" one. This impression is confirmed when the serial opens with a scene switching between the past and the present. The clips from the flashback show a school-going girl being sent off to a boarding house by her father and the clips from the present feature a grown-up girl (Shameen) sitting before a piano with her eyes closed and her countenance reflecting a painful expression. This suggests that the piano playing girl is recalling her own painful childhood. After a few seconds, Shameen is shaken out of her reverie by her maid, who informs her of a phone call from her father.

### **Lost Object of Love and Ambivalence**

This is the first point in the series at which Shameen emerges as someone possessing the traits of a melancholic person. While making one of the distinctions between mourning and melancholia, Freud says that for someone in the latter state, "the object has not perhaps

actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g., in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted)" (245). When viewers see in the first episode that Shameen's father is alive and on his way to Karachi to meet his daughter, it becomes clear that Shameen, in recalling her days spent in the hostel, was lamenting her father's negligent attitude, not his departure from the world. All the same, there remains for the viewer of *Kohar* what the psychoanalyst calls a melancholic person's "ambivalent" situation. When the girl who a few seconds before was saying "I hate goodbyes" (0:32) to herself while remembering how she had once bid farewell to her father shows excitement at the very person's arrival to Karachi, the viewer grows confused as to why was she in a painful state while sitting before the piano if she cannot wait to see her father and pick him up from the airport herself (3:39-40).

Here, the scenes based on memory assume the form of what Freud terms as something "withdrawn from consciousness" (245). Shameen's contrasting attitude towards the same person reveals that, on an unconscious level, she bears the pain of her father's ignorance. Unlike a person involved in the "work of mourning" (Freud 244), she grows sad only when her memory takes her back to her childhood. This is also evident in the preceding scenes, where Shameen takes her friend along and actively drives her car to the airport to pick up her father. Her excitement and alacrity on the way suggest that she "cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost" (Freud 245), also making the viewer question whether this is the same girl whose memory depicted her father as the reason for her painful childhood. The question that arises here is whether Shameen has truly lost her father's love, a question that also becomes difficult to answer for Freud, who "cannot see what it is that is absorbing" a melancholic person (246). If Shameen still loves her father so much, why is she unable to shun away his past actions? Her father might have made up for his past mistakes later on, but in Shameen's unconscious, he serves as a reminder of how he once made her feel unimportant and unworthy of his love.

## Past Experiences and Disregard for Ego

Shameen is also a character whose past experiences continue to haunt her present. When her father at whose arrival Shameen's happiness knew no bounds decides to go back to his work in the same episode, she is seen telling her maid that her father's departure makes no difference to her, for she has spent her entire life without him, either with her grandmother or in hostels (26:36-46). That this confined life has made her disinterested in the "outside world" (Freud 243) is proven when she says that she neither likes to hang out (27:11) nor attends weddings (2:15). Freud's view that past experiences project themselves onto the present of a melancholic person proves itself right in the case of Shameen in two ways – one being that her limited exposure to the world outside of hostels has made her diffident, and the other being that she is hesitant while accepting the love of any other person. When what is there in her unconscious (her neglected young self) resurfaces, she seems to grow fearful and step forward in her life, disregarding her "ego on a grand scale" (Freud 245) and considering herself now "incapable of love and achievement" (245).

*Kohar* becomes a visual example of this condescending attitude towards one's ego when Shameen utterly refuses to be herself when Sheroz, a man who falls in love with her at a wedding function, follows her to her house in the second episode. Choosing to hide her real self behind a smokescreen, Sharmeen tells him that the person he had met at the Mehndi function was her twin sister (43:07-08).

This imaginary twin sister is given a similar-sounding name by her, which is Sharmeen. Not only this, but she also tries to keep the meeting with him as short as possible and rushes into the kitchen, leaving her grandma to deal with the guest. At first, this act on Shameen's part seems like a practical joke cracked to tease Sheroz. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that her fear of being rejected after falling in love is what motivates her to tell this lie and avoid the man. This idea is seconded by her friend, Saman who in the third episode of the serial, says to Shameen that the reason why she told this lie is her prolonged attachment to her loneliness (17:55-18:06). However, this statement does not seem to be a clear or logical justification for Shameen's lie until Saman puts it more directly in the fifth episode by making Shameen realize that she is afraid of losing the people she loves, as a result of which she has stopped Sheroz from entering her life although she likes him. That her painful experiences from the past might have inclined her to do this is also reflected in the words of her grandmother, who, in the third episode, asks Shameen not to step back from happiness solely because she no longer trusts the feeling (37:19-24). Here, when it comes to creating a story to disregard her ego and a story that is influenced by past experiences, Shameen also fits the definition of a melancholic person as posited by Sophie Galabru, who says that people suffering melancholia also have a peculiar way of constructing narratives. Even the stories they create are not "dynamic", and do not "allow them to go beyond their past" (Galabru, 189). That Shameen is trying to evade love is realised by all those people surrounding her when, in the fourth episode, Shameen's gestures reveal that, contrary to what she says, she waits for the phone call from Sheroz.

At one point in the episode, her maid asks her why she keeps standing near the telephone. At another point, Saman, in her usual straightforward way of saying things, tells her that she was waiting for Sheroz's phone call when she made up a different voice on the call, that of the imaginary Sharmeen. However, it was Saman on the other side. With each passing attempt on Shameen's part to deepen this subterfuge, by preparing what she has to say and what kind of a voice she has to produce while enacting Sharmeen, instead of resolving this misunderstanding, her efforts to keep Sheroz at a distance from her real self-gain momentum. However, when the man refuses to step back and even starts visiting the house frequently to express his love for who he thinks is a girl named Sharmeen, Shameen is found saying to herself that she had tried hard to raise walls around her personality, breaking which a man has come closer to her (42:13-15). At this point in the second last episode of the serial, Shameen, instead of being told by others that she is trying to keep the element of love out of her life owing to her father's negligence after her mother's death, confesses it herself that what is happening in her life is something she had always tried to eschew, the proof being the statement mentioned above. Even after realising that her efforts have failed and she has fallen for Sheroz, she does not, even once throughout the serial, express her love, but keeps it to herself. Here, she aptly fits the description of those



people, whose “one part of the ego sets itself over against the other” (Freud’s 246). Describing their condition in detail, the psychoanalyst also says that the “patient’s self-evaluation concerns itself much less frequently with bodily infirmity, ugliness or weakness or with social inferiority; of this category, it is only his fears and asseverations of becoming poor that occupy a prominent position” (247).

However, Freud does not clarify the kind of poverty a melancholic person fears, inclining us to believe in Saman’s words that Shameen’s fear is that of the poverty of love, something she never received in her childhood and something she still thinks is not destined to be hers. Because of a “real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object relationship was shattered ... But the free libido was not placed on another object, it was withdrawn into the ego” and “an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss” (Freud 248). In the light of these statements, the viewer is taken back to the flashback scene of the serial’s second episode when Shameen is recalling how her mother once said to her that she should have been a boy so that her parents’ wish had come true (26:48-27:00). If this statement on the part of Shameen’s mother is analysed in the light of Freud’s description given above, then a lot of things become clear; Shameen’s disappointment in the idea of love stretches itself “back over the past” (Freud 245), emanating from her parents’ disregard of a girl-child and eventually causing her to lose confidence in people’s love for her, an example being Sherroz, for avoiding whom, she presents herself as a liar, or to describe it the way Freud has, as a “morally despicable” (245) human being.

### **Fury or Mania**

In the last episode of the serial, when her father tries to make up for his mistakes and shows concern for his daughter’s sadness when she finally takes a stand and refuses to marry Sherroz, Shameen makes it clear that she hates the word “love” and asks her father not to utter it (19:45-48). This scene is not only a reflection of what her childhood experiences have turned her into, but also what Freud terms as “mania” at many points and “fury” at one point. This scene from the last episode of *Kohar*, which starts at 17:22 and ends at 19:48 is a scene showing a quarrel between Shameen and her father, the former saying that her confused personality, causing her to tell lies and make up imaginary stories has been the result of her father’s ignorance resulting from his disappointment at having become a father of a girl instead of a boy. She goes on to say that her faith in love and trust has shattered due to the life of solitude she was forced to spend in hostels and boarding houses. This scene is unlike any other from the serial, for the quiet and shy girl who is hitherto observed wallowing in grief comes forward as a rebellious being who “has come pretty near to understanding” herself, for she is on a stage of “heightened self-criticism” (Freud 245), confessing before her father that she has grown up into a dishonest, lying girl who now knows no way out of her follies. Shameen, throughout this scene, is in a fit of fury, not ready to believe her father when he says that he loves her and instead asks him not even to speak the word “love” (19:45-48). Freud is of the view that at this stage, the melancholic person has “mastered the complex” (254). This seems to be true in the case of Shameen, for at this point in the story, she does not present herself as someone in a state of complex,

not knowing what she wants and what she does not wish (0:34-1:00), a question she asks herself in the fourth episode.

In the scene under consideration, she emerges as someone who now knows the reason for her grief, having finally made an effort to find out after being repeatedly asked by her father what keeps her upset. It seems as if after being forced to tell her father why she remains unhappy, Shameen finally decides to “thrust it (her complexes and feelings) aside” (Freud 254), look into her past, and come up with a plausible reason for her melancholia. That she has grown out of her confusion is also proven when, right after this scene, she decides to tell Sherroz that she had been lying to him until now about her twin sister. Her confidence in herself is reflected in her statement, in which she asks Sherroz to say whatever he wishes to her in his anger (29:00), who, in return, shouts at her and abandons her forever. Shameen's story, one that she created as a melancholic person, reaches a point here where it cannot be called a successful culmination of a love narrative. The lover abandoning her does not sit right with either the protagonist or the viewers, for the man leaves a girl we sympathise with for the most part. Quite contrary to traditional love stories, this one does not see an end of the kind which would satisfy the audience. Probing into its history further makes us realise that the story never had a proper beginning either, for Shameen, from the very beginning, was telling it as a story rooted in lies. This also inclines us to revert to Sophie Galabru's idea of converging melancholia and storytelling, who believes that the stories which melancholic people create, willingly or unwillingly, or tell, for that matter, are never traditional stories. Their narratives go beyond the oft-trodden paths of storytelling, having no proper beginning, no proper ending, or at times, wallowing even in a “refusal of storytelling” (Galabru, 197). Shameen's love story seems to fit into a narrative structure of a similar kind, especially when we make an effort to put it into a category and realize that the story does not fit any strict genre, rendering Shameen a melancholic person not only in terms of what Freud argues, but also in terms of what Galabru says about melancholic people.

## **Melancholia and Mist**

Having established Shameen as a melancholic character, it also becomes pertinent to explore why she is one, or why the experiences that have made her melancholic have outweighed her advantages, in the form of her privileged background, a loving grandmother, a devoted friend, and a potential suitor at her disposal. Here, the question regarding why Shameen is melancholic leaves the domain of psychoanalysis and ventures more into the environment she is placed in, and the atmosphere that environment creates for her. While the previous section has posited that her childhood has a significant role to play in her sadness, this section argues that there is a stimulant behind her childhood clinging to her, and that stimulant is the setting of the story.

Gabriele Gambaro's idea of ‘ecological aesthetics’ posits that an environment is a space “in which there is a reciprocal action of organism on environment and environment on organism” (qtd. in Gambaro 1). He also draws inspiration from Schmitz's idea of ecological aesthetics, which is later associated with the term ‘atmosphere’. He proposes



that it is the ecological atmosphere that emotionally affects humans and shapes their perceptions.

In light of these ideas, it becomes difficult for one to ignore the ecological aesthetics of *Kohar*, or its atmosphere or atmospherics, as Justine Pizzo also puts it for literary settings that are sensitive to the weather.

It is not only the title that is based on the Sanskrit word meaning 'mist' or 'fog'; throughout the drama, viewers are treated to a setting infused with fog. The very title screen of the serial shows Shameen standing amidst puffs of fog, and the story that follows introduces viewers to multiple scenes that extend the idea, showing Shameen time and again walking through haze or standing before a misty window. There are even instances in the serial where she seems to connect with the atmosphere, saying to herself in monologues that, like the very weather, her way forward appears to have gotten lost in the mist. This is the point at which Shameen is deeply entangled in trouble she has created for herself by lying to her wooer, and in the words of Gamboro, seems to "move and perform under the environmental characteristics" (2).

It is also important to investigate the origins of this foggy weather. Haseena Moin, one of the most celebrated dramatists of Pakistan, is known to have put her female characters at the centre of Karachi, where they participate in all the activities expected of a lively and responsible citizen. Be it Zara and Sanya from *Tanhaiyaan*, Sana from *Ankahi*, or Zoya from *Dhoop Kinare*, all the female characters in these shows educate themselves, work in offices, and create promising futures for both their families and them. In terms of the environment, it is the seascape that characterises the settings in which these female characters are placed, as can also be seen in the title frames of both *Ankahi* and *Dhoop Kinare*. However, unlike the female characters of these dramas, Shameen from *Kohar* is placed at the fringes of Karachi. It is on the outskirts where she resides with her grandmother, who expresses in the very episode that this far-off place gets on her nerves, and where the poet friend of Shameen's father happily comes to enjoy his solitude. This far-off mansion in a sparsely populated locality that is away from the densely populated city-life of Karachi welcomes the fog in its full swing, so much so that the vast lawn that surrounds the entire house is engulfed in the mist, and subsequently induces melancholy fits of brooding in Shameen which might not have been aroused had she lived in the middle of Karachi city with its less hoary environs due to its greater concentration of population. She seems to have been put in an environment that leaves her helpless and has nothing to offer her but emotional reflections, as, in the words of Gamboro, "ecological aesthetics is (also) concerned with the emotional experience aroused by environmental situations" (2). Fog, in this regard, with its sad atmosphere, serves as a figurative blockage, pushing Shameen to focus more on her past, albeit a painful one. Shameen does not experience bright, sunny days like Moin's other protagonists and becomes one with the environment, dwelling more on what she has been deprived of. "Hazy environments", argues Pizzo, "emphasise the dissoluble coherence of the female body and its surprisingly omniscient knowledge" (iii). The dissolution, according to Pizzo, is also of the "character interiority" and the "atmosphere" (iii).

## The Question of Misty Setting and Unappreciated Female Melancholia

Another question that demands critical attention is why Moin created a character so different from her other characters, placed her in a special environment, and then made her even more acutely receptive to those environs emotionally than her other heroines. Even before *Kohar*, Moin's female protagonists had always come across as sensitive to weather in varying degrees, but also resilient and practical. Shameen, on the other hand, appears more emotionally attuned to melancholy fits owing largely to the environmental conditions prevailing around her. The word "Kohar" as the play's title testifies to the crucial significance of the weather in the overall context of the play.

From a socio-political perspective, *Kohar* seems to be a nosedive in female experience. While *Ankahi*, *Tanhaiyaan* and *Dhoop Kinare* (all three blockbusters with strong-headed female characters) came out during Zia ul Haq's regime and were known for promoting the 'quiet rebellion' of Haseena Moin, as director Sahira Kazmi put it for the writings of the dramatist, *Kohar*, presenting a constantly depressed woman in a hazy atmosphere can be taken as a project rooted in post-rebellion tiredness on the part of the dramatist as well as the viewers. The tiredness can be linked to the realization that the dictatorial regime has done its best to push women back to the domestic sphere, or has, to a vast extent, imprinted a negative image in the minds of the people regarding women's resilience and workability, creating a bleak future for them, as the drama tries to posit in multiple ways. Shameen's wallowing in the past can be interpreted as a regression on the part of women, a backwards movement focused on the have-nots. "The 'Islamisation' was not only discriminatory but also deprived women of their basic rights in a radical society," says Amina Hassan while talking about the status of women under Zia ul Haq's regime in her article "National Women's Day: Remembering the brave women who took on Zia-ul-Haq". *Kohar*, in this regard, also seems to emerge forth from a period, the kind of which, according to Julia Kristeva, adds to people's melancholia owing to the "downfall of political and religious idols", which in turn create crises that are "particularly favourable to black moods" (8).

While we assume that the female melancholia in *Kohar* may be a by-product of the preceding government's efforts to curtail women's rights, it would be unjust not to look at *Kohar* from the perspective of the audience. *Kohar* did not garner the mass appeal of its predecessors. Despite Marina Khan's charm and acting finesse evident in her portrayal of Shameen, neither the play nor its heroine could win the viewers' hearts. Another proof that *Kohar* was a forlorn and forgotten serial is that it never aired again on television, while other serials featuring bright and bubbly female characters ran multiple times and became known across generations, even before the internet.

The poor reception of *Kohar* points to a reduced celebration of female protagonists in the aftermath of a dark regime for women, especially those female protagonists who were not resilient in the face of life's vicissitudes. The serial's debacle is also suggestive of the place of only those women (in front of and behind the screen) who followed Zia ul Haq's regime and were intellectually, not emotionally, charged. Through *Kohar*, thus, the

reception of female melancholia seems to have taken a backseat despite the efforts of the drama-makers to represent it with all its attendant complications. The negligent attitude towards the ecological aesthetics of the serial also went hand in hand with its overall failure, for the very depressing atmosphere of the serial, particularly for a female character, might have deterred many from engaging in public discourse. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the female audience might have had a part to play in this negative viewership, considering the powerful and feisty female characters they had grown accustomed to emulating as their role models before Shameen of *Kohar* made her way to the television screen.

## Conclusion

Shameen from the drama serial *Kohar* is a thoroughly melancholic character, as her disposition aligns well with people who, according to Sigmund Freud, are melancholic. However, the scope of this study cannot be simplified or reduced to mere psychoanalysis of Shameen's character. Placing her in that framework enables us to understand that Pakistani dramatists, whether driven by empathy or in response to the political climate, have written nuanced female characters whose problems extend beyond those of abusive husbands or toxic mothers-in-law, as is often the case with contemporary Pakistani female characters on television. Moreover, in the context of burgeoning theoretical frameworks, Shameen's receptivity to her environs turns her into a character who carries an atmospheric sensitivity and is not oblivious to the synchronisation between her internal and external forces. However, the character's failure to influence viewers raises questions about how we, as a collective audience, have been treating female melancholia or sadness, specifically female sadness that deviates from traditional parameters of sadness. Such a reception also prompts us to examine how our governments tend to influence both how we create characters and how we perceive emotions as a gendered discourse, encompassing both the writer and the reader/viewer. A new avenue which this research may open up can be a further analysis of all of Haseena Moin's dramas that followed *Kohar*, not a single one of which, interestingly enough, has produced protagonists as brave and vibrant as the protagonists of *Ankahi* (1983), *Tanhaiyaan* (1985) and *Dhoop Kinare* (1987).

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