

## ***(UN)QUEERING THE GENDER IDENTITY IN FAIQ MANSAB'S THIS HOUSE OF CLAY AND WATER***

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### **Abstract**

*The research delves into the concept, that heterosexual societies play fundamental role in curbing the freedom of transgender and female counterpart. In heterosexual societies, transgender and female are victimized on the basis of their attitude towards sexuality and gender norms. This heterosexual concept is considered as normal in the heterosexual societies. According to Judith Butler, gender is constructed through repetitive performative norms of gender. Heterosexuality victimizes the transgender and female on the basis of hegemonic heterosexual normative notion. Queer theory provides plenty of space to question these norms that are seen in heterosexual societies as natural, irrespective of the fact whether they involve sexuality, gender or some other form of normality. Queer theory defines individual sexuality as fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities.*

**Keywords:** Gender Identity, body and sexuality, repetitive performance, social construction.

### **Introduction**

*Queer theory, as an academic tool, has developed from gender and sexual studies. Queer theory debates about the established ideas about gender, identity and sexuality and challenges the notion of defined, finite and fixed identities. It also confronts the norm that creates binary on the basis of sexuality. Queer theorists attempt to elaborate that there is not set normal. "Heteronormativity" is the fundamental concept of Queer theory. Due to this world prevailing notion of heteronormativity, heterosexuality is being promoted as the only normal and approved sexual orientation. Queer theory provides plenty of space to question these norms that are seen in society as natural, irrespective of the fact whether they involve*

sexuality, gender or some other form of normality. Queer theory puts forward the idea of “individual sexuality as fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities”. It argues that sexuality may be different at different times over the span of our lives. The present investigates, that society and culture are the major factors in curbing the freedom of sexuality, desires and love in heterosexual society. In heterosexual society, transgender, gay and lesbians are victimized upon the idea of their attitude towards sexuality. For the study of these perspectives, work named as, *This House of Clay and Water* by Faiqa Mansab has been taken as a key text. The idea of this research is based on Judith Butler’s dictum that gender is constructed through the repetitive performance of gender. It means performativity of gender may be a formalized repetition of acts, an imitation of the dominant conventions of gender. Moreover, biological sex is also a social construction, means that gender classifies sex. Further, heterosexuality victimizes the gender roles in the society because hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealization. The aim of this research is to highlight the subjugation of woman and hermaphrodite on the basis of their sexuality and identity. In heterosexual society, only heterosexual orientation is considered as normal on the basis of gender identity, which is obviously constructed through repetitive performances. This study propagates the freedom of woman and hermaphrodite while negating the heterosexual idealization. This research helps to undermine the victimization of women and hermaphrodite and to dismantle the prevailing heterosexual binaries in the society. Further this research opens up the pathway to understand the patriarchal foundation of the heterosexual society that leads towards the male dominance not only in gender identity but in sexuality too. The present research has the potential to undermine the base structure on which any identity relies on and leads the new ways to understand questions about sexuality and gender identity. Through this research, the perception that queer theory is all about sexuality will be opposed by having a converging approach that sexuality cannot be disconnected from the other categories of social status and identity. This enables the queer theory to secure a place interdisciplinary and thus create new horizons of thinking in how sexuality shapes and is shaped by other factors.

### **Literature Review**

This chapter presents the over view of Faiqa Mansab’s work discussed by other intellectuals and critics. This chapter discusses the status of woman and hermaphrodites in Pakistani Society Keshava Guha (2017) in her article in *The Hindu* says, while reviewing the novel *This House of Clay and Water*, that it is a story of forbidden love in Pakistan. Mansab puts forward her view that Pakistan refuses to accept its own plurality and her stories emerge from discontent, disenfranchisement, and the periphery. In this very novel two characters, Nida and Shasha are fatally circumscribed in society. While Bhanggi, a character that is victimized and marginalized in a society on the basis of his intersex identity. Credit goes to Mansab

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*that Bhanggi is a categorically credible character rather than a vehicle for the novel's ideas. As a hijra (eunuch) he is the member of one of Pakistan's most misunderstood and admonished community. This House of Clay and Water has plenty of plots, but it is also a story of notions, above all of questions of whether and how Muslim faith coexists with liberty and individuality.*

*Seemita Das (2017) writes her review in Fleeting Brook and keenly observes the very novel and also supports Keshava Guha while giving the story of this novel, a title of forbidden love. She expresses the view that Mansab talks about the unique concept of life and death. In Mansab's opinion life is exacting and cruel while death is calm and oblivion. Life betrays everyone but death always finds us without fail. Moreover, morality especially with regards to sex was just depicted as primitive. Morality has lost these days, but on the other hand when we talk about Bhanggi an outcast hijra (eunuch), who seeks solitude in Data Sahab mosque, blesses and prays for worshippers at one hand while he is in constant struggle and at war with self and Allah, on the other hand. This is an anecdote of consolidation and separating, stereotyping and rebelling, patriarchy and equality, suppression and freedom, violation and redemption, cowardice and courage. But beside all these, this is a story of love. A love that flourishes at an unconventional bond and between two people who are far removed from each other- a woman and a eunuch. Then this tale arises questions like- does love without proximity carry the reason of disintegration or the curse of separation is must as eternity is simply a fantasy? Then who decides the forbidden line and taboo when every heart is contaminated? Why does it become impossible for love to be love simply, without the curious eyes of society labeling it legitimate or not.*

*Times of India (2017) published the review about this novel that Faiqa Mansab's propitious debut This House of Clay and Water is a charismatic tale of three souls in search of love, freedom and identity. Nida, Shasha and Bhanggi, all caught between the clamorous journey of life in their own way, with one and only utmost desire to be loved and to be free. The intelligent and lonely Nida, married to a prosperous political family, longs to break restrictions from the duty to unconditionally love her husband despite the fact that she fears to admit it. Sasha, the beautiful feminist, is a self-proclaimed current woman, with a marriage on the verge of wreckage, and a mind too enchained to trust that exploring her sexuality is the most effective manner to express her freedom. Then there is Bhanggi, a eunuch who opines that 'his' misfortune to examine the Quran has imbibed within him unrealistic expectations from society and from the universe, while he knows that the sector will always recollect him grime, an anomaly of nature, and as a result, he seeks safe haven in Allah. Destiny brings the three of them together at a Dargah, where Nida and Sasha grow to be confidantes, and Bhanggi reveals solace as a passive onlooker, sitting*

beneath a tree, watching Nida. Faiqa Mansab's expertise in narration can be considered out in her language, and the book offers a grave story of forbidden love from the myriads of desires expressed through thoughts, frame, and spirit.

Muhammad Omar Iftikhar (2017) shares his ideas on *This House of Clay and Water* and said that the novel has brought the new heights of creative thinking by highlighting complex details of society that is multi layer and hidden. The story has the multiple narrators i.e. Nida, Sasha, Bhanggi. Nida and Sasha are lost in their respective worlds. Nida, daughter and daughter-in-law of a political family is the victim of isolation seldom makes an effort to look or feel good. Sasha is exactly her opposite. Then there is another subjugated creature, Bhanggi, a transgender who is living at a Dargah in Lahore and experiences a unique spiritual relationship with Nida. Nida, who had never found true love and already seeking for this finds solace around Bhanggi. Mansab, by narrating this story has told us how the Pakistani society is cruel towards the women and eunuchs. Pakistani society is a male dominated society and women enjoy no status here. Hijras, in Pakistan and especially in Lahore are forced to live in an environment that is much abusive for them.

### **Research Methodology**

This is a qualitative and interpretive research. Work from South Asian Literature named as *This House of Clay and Water* by Faiqa Mansab has been taken as key work. Different articles, research papers have been taken for support and references. Judith Butler has been considered as key theorist for the research. The theoretical framework of this research is based on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. In Butler's view gender is constructed through repetitive performance of gender. In doing so, there would be a great deal wider horizon of evaluation and lots of different dimensions of sexuality aside from gender attraction. Further, only heterosexual norms are considered as normal in heterosexual society while subjugation women and hermaphrodites. Women and hermaphrodite are victimized on the basis of their gender and sexuality.

### **Analysis**

Queer theory especially LGBT provide a road map to interpret the contextual analysis of the texts which reflect the notion that in South Asian societies particularly Pakistani society, heterosexuality is constructed at socio-political level. Moreover, this concept of heterosexuality and heterosexual love incarnate the homosexuality by labeling it abnormal. The research investigates that the society and culture are soul responsible in restraining the freedom of sexuality, desires and love in heterosexual society. In heterosexual society, transgender, gay and lesbians are being victimized upon the basis of their behavior towards sexuality and gender.

Judith Butler puts forward the idea of "gender performativity". Butler reexamines the relationship between "sex" and "gender". She has opined that "sex" and "gender" is totally different and gender is constructed by the society and

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heterosexual norms. Butler further affirms that as gender is different from sex then it is the society and system supports the foundations of patriarchal heterosexist hegemony.

In her *This House of Clay and Water* Faiqa Mansab encounters the ordeals and miseries of Pakistani female and hermaphrodites. The novel tells a story of married woman named as Nida and a hermaphrodite named as Bhanggi, while depicting that in Pakistani society woman and hermaphrodites have no place in society. Novel shows that Pakistan is the country where male chauvinism is the prevailing norm. Society is totally under the control of male member of the society. Woman is considered as a commodity and faces subjugation not only at domestic level but also in society as well. Woman is being victimized in every aspect whether it is the matter of education, decision making or self identity. Same is the case with hermaphrodites and even they face a worst situation. They have no place in society. Their condition even becomes more pathetic when they are not considered human being at all. They are supposed to die at the time of birth and if they survive they remain totally on the account of cruel society. Mansab in her novel explores that Pakistani society and culture deprive the rights from women and hermaphrodites.

In the support of Judith Butler's views, the concept of Michael Foucault, Simon de Beviour have been used as they are also discussed by Butler in her book "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" the light of Butler ideas, I have analyzed all the above mentioned crisis of women. Nida as a woman always becomes the victim of male dominant society. As a girl she was subjugated by her father and brothers after marriage she entrapped by the same male chauvinism by her husband and in laws. Nida is always being reminded by her assigned gender role that she should be a good daughter and wife and in doing she must be submissive. She was considered like a commodity that has nothing to do with intellect and self-identity. Before marriage she was not allowed to think for herself and she could not take any decision, "for the longest time I'd seen the world through my mother's eyes. I had loved and hated, approved and disapproved with the neuron patterns; instilled in me over the years" (Mansab 2017, p. 35). After marriage she was treated as "other" in her in laws house. Her husband always remained busy in his political career neglecting that his wife needs him. Like traditional Pakistani husbands, he always reminded Nida that she would be grateful to him for marrying and loving her. In Pakistani culture women are being considered as unpaid servants. Being woman is itself a "Mistake" because a woman is answerable for each and every misfortune that come to her husband and family. This filthy and sick mentality and patriarchal society subjugates the minds of women, no matter who they are; daughter, wives or daughter in laws. Mansab's protagonist is the victim of the same subjugation as she writes "sometimes I wished I could just vanish, evaporate" (Mansab, 2017, p.3).

Butler opines that gender is socially constructed through the repetitive performance of gender. She says, "gender is culturally constructed: hence gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler, 1999, p. 9-10). So, same is the case with Nida. As a woman, Nida always witnesses the role of a woman as subjugated and submissive commodity towards her husband and family. Nida was being victimized upon the gender role assigned to her by male dominant and heterosexual culture. Nida was trapped between her own self-identity and male chauvinistic society. But she found her outlet of depression and frustration when she developed a love relationship with Bhanggi, they are humiliated because this cruel world of heterosexual hegemony know only two gender i.e men and women. The third gender is called with such derogatory remarks as hermaphrodite, eunuchs, stain on humanity, forgetting that they are also human beings, Mansab shows that as Pakistani heterosexual and that patriarchal society give a place of minority to women, it gives no place to hermaphrodite. Bhanggi faces a tragic fate, who is exiled from the society only due to her sexuality and gender.

Foucault argues in *History of Sexuality* (1981) that sexuality is not about having a specific sex but how it plays its role assigned by the society and culture. Pakistani socio cultural setup assigns inferior roles to women as obedient to brothers and father, making dinners for in-laws, giving birth to babies and serving husbands till death without any demand. If a woman is having some difficulties over her marriage then it's her own mistake and according to set cultural patterns of Pakistani society she is not performing her duties sensibly. Women have to hide from others if they are not happy. If they will share their domestic matters they will be a cause to damage the family repute. Nida, too tries to keep secret her unhappy marriage as she said, "I love my husband. He's my best friend" (Mansab 2017, p.24). In Pakistani culture patriarchy as a system arouses against equality and has been absorbed into the structures of feudalism, tribalism and more recently in capitalism. Women's power of thinking is always questioned by the patriarchal society even men don't feel need to think what they said or what need. Women are just and misapprehension to them, "This women is an enigma. She is like a dream you follow within a dream. She makes no sense" (Mansab 2017, p.31).

Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* (1984) opines that body and sexuality are cultural 'construct' and Pakistani socio-cultural and heterosexual hegemony construct and eunuchs as 'out casts' and 'forbidden' creature. Bhanggi was treated as an animal only because of his gender role and sexuality assigned by the culture and society. All of her miseries are only due to her body that does not fit into the definition as men or women, "I learnt that early in my life na. I am like the spaces that belongs to no one; a dirty thought never acknowledged" (Mansab,2017, p.5). Bhanggi is ill treated on the basis of her sexuality and gender role. Hermaphrodites are not considered living being by neglecting and forgetting that they have no mistake in this

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case "how can anyone be held responsible for the body they are born with ji" (Mansab, 2017, p.5). Bhanggi bears insult and humiliation and her miseries heightened to his sexuality and she is subjugated at the margin of the society. At birth her family refused to accept her as being third gender. She always had desire to live with her family but her desire remained unrequited till her miserable death "this cage of bones and death that hold me prisoner.....makes a mockery of me and my desires, destroys me daily" (Mansab,2017,p.5)

Simon de Beauvoir. Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* argues that "one is not born woman, but, rather becomes one". Beauvoir is pretty much clear in her stance that one "becomes" a woman but always under the heterosexual or patriarchal societal pressure. She claims that "the body is a situation". While taking these concept of Beauvoir Nida's character when she says, "What claim had I ever laid to my body? I'd never even acknowledge it as mine" (Mansab, 2017, p.185).

This concept by Beauvoir has also its connection with Foucault, women are helpless to control the functions their bodies are playing as according to Foucault, bodies are governed and controlled by the culture, they can just look what's going on with their bodies and they mourn over it silently "Things happened to my body, and I watch them happen. I watch it being penetrated, impregnated and apotheosized to motherhood of its own accord, independent of my will" (Mansab, 2017, p.185).

As in Pakistan hermaphrodites are not allowed to live within the societies where we live. They are exiled from the residential areas where people having sexual roles lives. Lacan said for hermaphrodites that they are the unstable identities. They are unstable because of their sexuality. When their gender and sexuality is not recognized then they became unstable when they open their eyes for the very first time. Socio-cultural setup of Pakistan treats them as they are not the living organism by forgetting that they have no mistake in this case " How can anyone be held responsible for the body they are born with ji" (Mansab, 2017, p.5).

"Personal identity is a characteristic that differentiates one from the other while social identity is categorization of self into more broad unit that depersonalize the self-concept" (Turtletouille, 2015, p.1). The personal and social identities of transgender, both, are in question due to their sexuality and society. Bhanggi is facing this insult in both ways i.e. in his personal life, in his own opinions and in society as well. Due to his body and sexuality he is subjugated. When he was born, his family refuses to own him as being a third gender he doesn't belong to them. His wish to live with his family remains unfulfilled till his death "This cage of bones and flesh that holds me prisoner..... makes a mockery of me and my desires, destroys me daily" (Mansab, 2017, p.5).

In Pakistan hermaphrodites suffer due to their unstable bodies and sexuality. They are not allowed to get education because they are like aliens and can't have the

*schools and the roof of other educational institutes with men and women. They are not allowed to live within the societies as our culture doesn't allow them to live. They are alienated from the society as Mansab shows the clear picture of this practice in her novel This House of Clay and Water and tells us about the separate place of eunuchs "the hijra chawl" (Mansab, 2017, p.6)*

*Sexuality is something that is produced by the society and hermaphrodites are useless in Pakistani society, it doesn't mean they are, they are made useless by this socio-cultural setup. They have different bodies that are why they are inferior. The question arises who made them inferior? , where is written that all the hermaphrodites are outcasts? Then, the only answer we have is that we, the human beings, our culture and our social values designed by us made them so.*

*Mansab shows that hermaphrodites in Pakistan face the bitterness of life even in their childhood. Being a kid they grow with other hijras living in the hijra chawl and observe them suffering due to body and sexuality. Bhanggi, separated from his family started living with other hijras and see them how society treats them just because the things or the body parts of hijras that are hidden within the two legs are not same as men and women.*

*Mansab depicts in her novel hermaphrodites are wretched souls having nothing with them. They are the empty souls. They have no relations, no mother, no father, no siblings, no kids, and no friends as 'they are the hollow men'. Only death is their destination:*

*"I am destined to die a little every day. Every time I realize I cannot love or be loved, I die a little. Every time jeering children throw stones at me, when women want benediction but are repulsed by the very touch they think they will bring, I die a little" (Mansab, 2017, p.101)*

### **Discussion and conclusion**

*From the above analysis it can be concluded that in heterosexual society particularly in Pakistani society women and hermaphrodites are subjugated and victimized on the basis of their gender role and sexuality and considered. In patriarchal society only heterosexuality is considered as normal. In my research I have concluded that women and hermaphrodites should be treated as respected human being rather commodities. Women and hermaphrodites must be free from the subjugation on the basis of their gender role and sexuality.*



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