

Article

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Faiqa Mansab`s *This House of Clay and Water*: The Representations of Transgenders in Heteronormative Pakistani Society

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to focus on victimization, discrimination, stigmatization and marginalization of transgenders in heteronormative Pakistani society. Transgenders are socially ostracized individuals in Pakistan. This paper is an effort to examine the representation of a transgender protagonist Bhanggi in Faiqa Mansab`s novel *This House of Clay and Water* (2017). The paper uses the conceptual framework of Judith Butler`s queer theory and argues that Bhanggi is victimized and stigmatized throughout his life due to his gender. The paper further reflects on real life stories of transgenders and demonstrates how they face different kinds of victimizations in Pakistani society.

Key words: Heteronormativity, Transgenders, Victimization, Stigmatization, Queer Theory, Pakistan.

Introduction

In recent times the issue of gender identity has become complicated and conflicted. Its subjectivity as well as its portrayal from various perspectives has been a matter of debate for postcolonial theorists,

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feminists, and post-structuralists. The word gender or sex has therefore been in an endless struggle, culminating from time to time in different perceptions. With identity deprivation, transgenders have become an oppressed segment of society. The word *Hijra*¹ is used in South Asia to denote eunuchs, intersex or transgender individuals. For centuries, the *Hijra* community² has been a part of the subcontinent. The *Hijra* community, where *Hijras* live, is a well-defined and organized community led by a *Guru*.³ *Hijras* held an important place in the Mughal court and administrative structure during Mughal-era in Subcontinent from the 16th to 19th centuries. The English colonizers outlawed the *Hijra* community by various acts of legislation during colonialism. Some *Hijra* activists have been occupied with fighting for their rights and official recognition since the 20th century. They also fall victim to violence and prejudice. Violence and animosity towards them is very normal these days.

Transgenders are persons whose gender identities do not correspond to their biological sex. Their physical body and mannerism generally differ from common men and women. Transgender individuals therefore include those whose identities and actions do not adhere to the traditional standards and norms of gender. They may be queer homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, lesbian or gay. Transgenders are commonly viewed as "unnatural" and "abnormal" by society and become targets of mockery and terror. Being the oppressed group of Pakistani society, transgenders have to endure legal, social, and pecuniary problems. Pakistani society oversees intersexes with distrust and hatred. Because of undeclared restrictions imposed on them, their education and public sphere activities are limited. They are compelled by this discrimination to select a life of isolation and alienation. In each social circle, these individuals are oppressed, relegated, sidelined, downgraded, and are seen as the "Other"⁴ of the society.

Faiqa Mansab's debut novel *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) highlights the problem of gender identity as she depicts in her novel a transgender character named Bhanggi, his dilemma of life and endurance after being abandoned by parents. Her bold novel inquires the heterosexual standards of contemporary Pakistani society through portraying the peripheral and vulnerable position of the *Hijra* community in the society.

This article aims at exploring and highlighting the politics of heteronormativity that ultimately pushes transgenders to a marginalized position in Pakistani society in general, as well as that portrayed in Faiqa Mansab's fiction. The study focuses a transgender character known as Bhanggi and his predicament of being a *Hijra* by bringing to foreground multiple facets of his personality as he is frequently wavering between two worlds- male- female, love-hate, life-death and so on . The current article tackles the dilemma of the *Hijra* community and the dominant society's hostile attitude towards people who do not adhere to the traditional gender norms. The researchers explore victimization, discrimination and marginalization of transgender in contemporary Pakistani society as portrayed in Faiqa Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* (2017).

The researchers bring to foreground transgenders' oppression, inequality, gender discrimination in the light of Queer theory. Transgenders suffer oppressive and inhuman treatment at the hands of Lahori Bourgeoisie in the selected novel. The present research draws attention towards the depiction of contemporary Pakistani society victimizing transgenders. Furthermore, efforts are made to trace out different facets of Bhanggi's personality who belongs to the Hijra community and occupies pivotal position as the protagonist in the novel. Therefore, the present research highlights the aspirations, feelings and emotions of Bhanggi amid heteronormative Pakistani society in Faiqa Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* (2017). The present study reflects upon the ways in which a transgender is victimized by Pakistani society. The current article traces the struggle of a transgender to locate him in a biased and ruthless society. Furthermore; this study highlights the emotional, social, psychological and financial problems of transgenders amidst contemporary Pakistani society. The study also carries the in-depth analysis of personality of a transgender character Bhanggi which will be helpful in understanding day-to-day snags and major challenges faced by intersexes especially due to their gender identity. This article is going to highlight the glitches that transgenders are facing inside their Hijra community as well as outside their community and how they are exploited, suffered and marginalised in the name of social laws, taboos and religion. It also examines factors such as gender identity and heteronormativity leading to stigmatization,

discrimination and victimization of transgender amidst contemporary Pakistani society in the selected novel.

Judith Butler`s Queer Theory

Judith Butler in her most celebrated work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) exemplifies a postmodern view of gender and states that gender is just a performance or act played by individual persons. She states "Those who fail to approximate the norms are condemned to a death within life."⁵ (Butler 1990) Thus, by stating gender as an act or a performance, she proposes that gender is not a fixed category. Therefore, her concepts of gender identity oppose essentialism and fixed identity.⁶ If one does not act within the parameters of heteronormativity, he/she may lose any gender sense of one's own. Pakistani society tends to be strongly patriarchal and heteronormative. The definition of heteronormativity signifies a gender and sexual interdependence that describes gender as a binary structure and naturalizes the belief that heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation or that sexual and marital relationships exist between individuals of two opposite sexes. This very concept and definition of heteronormativity always propels transgenders to the margins labeling them as "aberrant" or "abnormal"," queer", "sick" and so on. The authors of this paper have employed the concept of heterosexual matrix generated by Butler which establishes a "hegemonic discursive paradigm of gender intelligibility which implies that there should be a stable sex articulated by stable gender for bodies to cohere as well as make sense, which is described oppositionally as well as hierarchically by the mandatory custom of heterosexuality."⁷

Undoing Gender (2004) by Butler illustrates two key notions, acknowledgement and gender abuse, which exacerbate the relationship between the self and the perceptions of others.⁸ People are always searching for recognition since "It's through the presence of acceptance that each one of us is a socially acceptable person."⁹ To be understood, one always has to match the social norms that offer us individuality as well as a society; "These social standards essentially determine the viability of our individual personhood".¹⁰ Judith proposes "We view the 'norm' as binding us, yet we still consider the 'norm' establishing cohesion via an exclusion strategy".¹¹ In a transgender`s case, it`s the public, the community

which has the authority to accept transgenders as understandable or incomprehensible. In other words the authority to give them dignity or not rests with society and not with transgender individual beings. Butler's notion of gendered violence stems from the rejection of societal standards and values. Gendered violence happens when people live outside the agreed societal values, standards and norms. Transgender people often experience gender-based abuse, violence and victimization. Butler observes that violence against transgenders is not recognized as abuse or victimization. It's because intersex individuals aren't accepted as real or intelligible, she claims. In an interview in 2015 Butler called for transgender civil rights: "Nothing seems to be more essential for transgender individuals than having direct exposure to outstanding health care system, having the legislative and judicial right to enjoy their own lives to the fullest, and having their liberty."¹²

Sexuality, Gender, Stigmatization, Victimization and Identity crisis

Stigma is a characteristic that informs stereotyped devaluations. Goffman (1963) formally described stigma as an attribute which is profoundly discrediting.¹³ Stigma for Goffman (1963) is a general part of social life which hinders regular grass root-level interactions — the stigmatized may be cautious to associate with those that don't display their stigma, and those who aren't stigmatized can neglect or try to avoid stigmatized people.¹⁴ Goffman (1963) investigates the thoughts of the stigmatized individual about himself and his correlation with normal people. He examines the range of tactics used by stigmatized people to cope with the disapproval of other people and the complicated types of information they establish about themselves.¹⁵

Foucault (1976) supports the notion of restricting sexual activity by systemic means but opposes the notion that sexuality has not been spoken about or has been repressed. He insists on giving it the title "the repressive hypothesis".¹⁶ Sexuality isn't natural but is created through debate and discourse, according to Foucault.¹⁷ He finds it a reason why sexuality has now become a question of identity that indicates the "birth of homosexuality" and its increasing recognition.¹⁸

Rich (1980) popularized the concept of "Compulsory Heterosexuality".¹⁹ She posits that patriarchal society always imposed such concepts. Anyone who deviates from such norms is regarded as "deviant" or "abhorrent."²⁰ To describe the stronghold of heterosexual norms and standards, Rich stated: "The inability to investigate heterosexuality like an institution is as refusing to understand that the economic structure named capitalism or racism's class structure is sustained by a number of factors, involving physical aggression as well as mistaken conscious".²¹

Rubin (1984) emphasizes a plurality of interest in sexuality. She keeps emphasizing the all-encompassing contradiction of power and its constructs. According to Rubin, it occurs that sexuality has its own fundamental laws, inequities, and forms of exploitation.²² The fundamental statement she describes is that sexuality is just like gender politics.²³ Since the dawn of time, the power structures have confined the word sexuality in a delirium and negotiated it as such. Rubin gives a thorough analysis on the concept of 'sexual essentialism'²⁴ against the belief that sexuality is social, static and plays no part in the human's nurturing, values, principles and conditions.

Ahmed (2007) in one of her essays explains certain notions and objects such as how the institutions of matrimony, domestic sphere as well as heterosexual closeness are viewed as "good objects"²⁵ which ensure future contentment as determined by society. Her work is specifically about certain people and groups who are considered to be different or divergent since they are already assumed to be unhappy. These individuals ultimately seek to find contentment in unexpected things which are usually measured to be society's taboos. While doing her analysis to characters like the "'miserable LGBT and wistful immigrant,"²⁶ she emphasizes the need to distinguish the false definition of contentment from the genuinely "happy" and explores the "dissatisfied records"²⁷ in which every character represents a medium to highlight alternative forms of surviving.

Bischoff (2012) investigates complicated relationships which occur between transgender people and their bodies, their private relations and identity.²⁸ She claims that transgender women affirm their self-identity by changing the body, either physically or subtly (i.e., clothing, movements and so on) or by becoming

compatible to standards of femininity.²⁹ A woman's body alleviates the tension of a cognitive or implicit sex and a body and reinforces a woman's self-identity. By navigating cultural expectations, they gain approval and acceptance as well as their personal sentiments and uncommon behaviors.

Piazza and Fasulo (2015) highlight the disparity between the concepts of 'stigma' and 'marked identity' in conjunction with the concept of 'diversity.'³⁰ According to them, identity isn't a fixed fact but a mechanism whereby people discuss with others the version of who they are.³¹ Both 'mark' and 'stigma'³² specifically cite to a loss or gap whereby the person endures depreciation. The word 'marked'³³ emphasizes a sort of special characteristic but not surely a negative one. It simply shows a distinct, out-of-the-ordinary identity and as such, this identity must not be concealed but instead made clear. In reality there seems to be a continual juxtaposition between massive scale, long-term societal alterations impacting identity processes, limited scale and quicker discourse shifts around particular groups as well as labels and the path of people choosing and changing identity positions as well as narratives all along the trajectory. Piazza and Fasulo concentrate on the realities of living along a social label – coping with an identity and a biography which is gripped by an omnipresent negative perception in public discourse.³⁴ A core issue is that identities are relational and even through the impact of prejudices in public discourse; our sense of self is built in local contexts.³⁵

Voices: Stories of Stigmatization, Discrimination, Injustice and Abuse

Gender discrimination is indeed a worldwide problem and one of the most discriminated and stigmatized in Pakistan is the *Hijra* community. Compelled into sex work, begging or singing and dancing to earn money, they are deserted by their families as well as ostracized by the society. Because of their failure to comply with the existing conventional gender binary in Pakistan, they encounter a lack of recognition, endure marginalization in society and encounter an uphill battle to stay alive. By victimization and inequality, they are relentlessly oppressed as they are forcefully evicted as misfits by society. Such prejudice contributes to physical and mental damage that is often severe. While gender activisms as well as intensified

advocacy for transgender rights have recently increased, the situation on the ground persists by and large exceptionally hard for transgenders. It is proved through research that transgenders are still obligated to adopt a socially secluded life in Pakistan. They are discouraged from engaging in mainstream events by social deceptions and dilemmas. "A myriad of socio-economic and religious restrictions act as a catalyst for a debauched and immoral lifestyle to be embraced, predominantly as a sex worker or beggar."³⁶

Social behavior towards transgenders in Pakistan has been discriminatory and prejudiced, despite several awareness campaigns generated for transgenders. In Pakistan, transgenders have long been a subject of jokes and bullying, with thousands murdered illegally for not falling into the spheres of society. Dolphin Ayan's recent case is an instance of how citizens in Pakistan mock and humiliate transgenders. The stigma glued to transgenders was also endured by Dolphin Ayan. Ayan is a Civil Engineering graduate from Cyprus, who completed an internship and is a college topper. Yet Ayan could never gain any reputable position in society, even after displaying intellectual excellence. Ayan sees herself as a shemale. She was repeatedly bullied with offensive names throughout college life because of being effeminate. She has now set all of her educational credentials aside after being totally shattered and now stepped into the field of professional dancing like other transgenders in Pakistan. Our society's hostile attitude towards transgenders has driven competent people like Ayan to pursue this career path. Ayan highlighted the victimization of transgenders by society in an interview. "I see humans but not humanity. I hate people calling me Hijra. I'm going to quit this and go back to college if only people stop calling me that. Nobody could ever erase the stigma from themselves."³⁷ (Ayan 2020) The toxic masculinity of Pakistani society has driven him to become what he is today.

In a country like Pakistan, speaking the truth normally, although not always, comes with a price. No matter whether you are a feminist marching for equal privileges or a writer expressing your views or a transactivist struggling for her people, they'll do everything they can to suppress you if what you speak clashes with the views of those in control. The horrific video clips of the transgender Julie Khan's harassment by Jajja Butt were released on Pakistani social

media in 2016.³⁸ In a subsequent clip in which Julie outlined the abuse she had endured at Butt's hands, she revealed that three months earlier in Faisalabad, she had also been gang-raped by a same gang that had initially prompted her shift to Sialkot. Julie became a Trans Rights activist after these life-altering incidents. She advocated for the privileges of the Hijra community in Pakistan and exposed several defective facets of society, particularly digital-age parents and snobbish culture. She voiced her views vociferously, recognizing fully that she is a vulnerable transwoman who might possibly be threatened by her actions. Julie was informed that she could not have access in the hotel in 2018 to attend a meeting at Serena Hotel unless she specified her gender. Obviously she declined to comply with this order and was subsequently informed that transgenders were not allowed within the boundaries of the hotel. "We can't marry, we can't bear children. I'm neither a man nor a woman. So this is how we lead our lives. We're neither."³⁹

Julie Khan has become one of the targets of the power-hungry regime when Julie and three other transwomen were framed by a fellow transwoman, Lubna, alleging they burst into her home and robbed her. Julie was arrested by the police under a false claim on 10 August 2020.⁴⁰ The purpose underlying Julie's arrest is much more complex than just her dispute with some people of her own community, as per Julie's attorney Hassan Niazi. Niazi claims that NGOs, many Trans community members as well as other influential figures in Pakistan are all engaged in enforced begging and trading transgenders for their benefit from one "guru" to another. Mostly parents of transgenders abandon them as youngsters so these gurus move up to take them in. While they act as their guardians, gurus also subject transgenders, financially or otherwise, to dreadful crimes of exploitation.⁴¹ Julie has endangered her life several times to campaign for her community and questions the faulty network which involves the guru mafia. After several attempts by her lawyer to fight her case, Julie was eventually released on bail on August 18, amid relentless outrage from the public. Julie's struggle, nevertheless, does not finish here. Other than her anticipated prosecution which has yet to be declared, her life faces menace from those who aim to silence her.

Transgenderism: Through the lens of Pakistani Dramas and Films

The stereotypical depictions of gender in the media are especially significant because these representations of gender build the beliefs and behaviors of the audience. In every society, the media has the capacity to describe gender norms, stereotypes, and perceptions. Our conceptions regarding gender relations are influenced by the media. It is a major social problem in Pakistan to commit infanticide or to disown transgender infants. In Pakistan, this issue was explored for the very first time in cinema through Urdu movie *Bol* (2011). The film's author/director, Shoaib Mansoor opines: "Having been so fortunate in life, I always think of things for which I ought to be thankful. It appears like the list never stops, but it inevitably ends with one thing ... that I was born a MAN. In a country like Pakistan, where obscurantism has deep roots, nothing in the world terrifies me more than the idea of being born a woman or a hermaphrodite."⁴² (Mansoor 2011) *Bol* talks about Pakistani transgenders' status and position in society. *Bol* very cautiously deconstructs problems of sexuality as well as sexual identity. In its wider sense of patriarchy, feudal system, religious belief and nation-state, it highlights the problem. As the title implies, the exercise of tongues is often prohibited for other or subalterns or minorities.

In the film, Haqim Sahib got a son named Saifi after seven daughters, who is a transgender. Hakeem Sahib knows the injustices, discrimination and humiliation the child will encounter in a Pakistani society. Eventually he keeps Saifi inside the four walls of the house. The outside world is prohibited to him. Both parents decide to tell everyone that Saifi is possessed by a jinn. Instead of celebrating Saifi's birth, these scenes illustrate how fear, embarrassment, and dissatisfaction are hovering in the environment at the birth of a transsexual due to the simple fact that the child isn't born into the conventional binary gender, the baby is not even viewed as a human being. In *Bol*, the film's narrator, Zainab, tells the tale of Saifi. She mentions the challenges, behaviors, and hardships he experienced in various stages of his life. His world was confined to his home's four walls, which epitomizes how isolated Saifi is, concealed by his father as well as society as a whole. Saifi is a woman stuck in the body of a man. But trapped in a man's body, it is expected that he must comply with the masculine rules of behavior and also strive to what a male purports or dreams of. But he is attracted to men which is regarded as a taboo or abnormal. He

embraces maleness, but is viewed as a woman and ridiculed at his place of work. He becomes the target of truck drivers' sex abuse. Hakeem Sahab worries that Saifi will be pushed into the dance field, turning into a prostitute and their family will be ridiculed. Consequently, he strangles Saifi in a plastic bag and murders him. Thus, first through the endurance of sexual abuse and secondly through the experience of barbaric demise, Saifi has paid the price for his identity. It accurately represents how the binary other is strangled and muted forever. Transgenders are neither represented as humans in cinema nor allowed to have contended and normal fates.

According to Muslims' belief, each individual is a creation of Allah in this world. Undoubtedly, Allah loves all of His creations alike; however human beings prefer to establish gender distinctions. The drama *Khuda Mera Bhe Hai* (2016) focuses a mother Mahagul who gives birth to a transgender named Noor and the subsequent problems she encounters in her family and community, where it's a taboo to accept transgenders. Characters are shown fretting about themselves, their image and what society will think as well as say about them as soon as a transgender baby is born. The father declines to even keep the baby. In giving the baby up to the *Hijra* community, he expresses no affection for the infant and holds no guilt. He foresees his transgender child's problematic future and has no strength to confront degrading and humiliating criticisms from his family and friends. Consequently, he leaves his wife. The drama uncovers how the birth of a transgender baby shook a high-headed and confident woman Mahagul so profoundly that she couldn't have the strength to defy her family who required her to abandon her child. She however takes the child back from *guru* and puts all her efforts into Noor's upbringing and education, despite the massive social strain and family resistance. She shows that transgender individuals can be valuable people of society but only after a prolonged struggle against societal taboos and conventional standards. Noor falls for a girl but she dumps him after a short-term relationship after learning about his transgenderism. The drama also highlights the prejudices, gender inequality, and stigmatization faced within Pakistani society by transgenders and their identity crisis.

The drama serial *Alif Allah aur Insaan* (2017) portrays five transgender characters in the stereotypical occupation of street dancing and singing. This drama is about yet another one-sided love affair. Shammo is a transman. He loves Rani but she rejects him due to his gender, his nervousness and his stigmatized *Hijra* career. Heartbroken Shammo changes his career to appease Rani and becomes a hairdresser but of no use. For *Hijras*, cisgender characters in the drama use derogatory words. It describes the manner in which *Hijras* are addressed and treated in a Pakistani society. Transgenders are considered unclean, unnatural, imperfect, hideous, and portrayed as beggars and prostitutes. In addition to identity problems, the social subjectivity of the *Hijra* community tends to be the key point of a drama narrative.

Analysis and Discussion on *This House of Clay and Water*

Judith Butler's Queer Theory challenges the heterosexual paradigm and offers room to those whose identities and attitudes are not in line with their biological sex.⁴³ The selected novel, *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) depicts the problematic, disgraceful and dreadful state of transgenders in patriarchal Pakistani society. It is pulsating by an apprehension of and sympathy with transgenders to whom bourgeois Lahori and by extension, contemporary Pakistani society, denies the chance to attain satisfaction and happiness on their own terms. The transgender character Bhanggi is frequently wavering between two worlds: male- female, love-hate, life-death and so on. Often, he seeks to suppress desire and attraction altogether. He either suffers the agony of societal stratification or seeks to locate his identity in the intricate social and gender taxonomy which is shaped by the dominant class. To seek true affection as well as acceptance, Nida and Bhanggi, the protagonists of the chosen novel, cross the socially and traditionally acceptable limit. Yet they are compelled to undergo the trail of interrogating society. In a country where gender – or anatomy – describes a person's role and significance, the writer investigates the toils of transgenders and their destitutions. This bold stance of writer questions the heterosexual standards of contemporary Pakistani society through portraying the peripheral and vulnerable position of the *Hijra* community in the society.

To begin with, the authors of this paper have found that Mansab has depicted the effect of the grave side of the multiethnic world on

the life of a transgender called Bhanggi in *This House of Clay and Water* (2017). Throughout the book, the naturalized binary gender difference is questioned via Bhanggi's life story. He has a body that blurred traditional male and female boundaries. His tale illuminates the difficulties of living in a world that is marked by an essentialist gender interpretation. Bhanggi does not act within the parameters of heteronormativity and so loses gender sense of his own, the concept popularized by Butler (1990).⁴⁴ The narrator Mansab portrays a contemporary Pakistani society where transgender is victimized, despised, marginalized and considered as a disgrace. Mansab, with much vitality explains the journey of Bhanggi from his childhood as an intersex to his maturation as an adult. His gender identity made him lose his place in the society which is highly heteronormative. Disregard and loss that he confronted during his life turned his character to that of a stoic.

Transgenders are always relegated to the borders by the conventional society. Their dreams, hopes, desire have no worth at all to the people. So, the characters who don't fit into the defined roles of society are made to form their own world. They are like a minority within a minority. They conduct some realistic material activities to make their presence known. So Bhanggi in the novel assumes the role of a Qalandar in Daata Darbaar firstly to make peace with his inner conflicts, secondly to be accepted by the people of society in which he resides. "Helping others used to make me feel more than what I was. I am nothing but a symbol for them".⁴⁵ (Mansab 2017, 65) Daata Darbaar offers refuge and hope for many people such as Bhanggi who have been ostracized by the civilized world. Bhanggi has sought to flee inside himself from the borderland of the gender dispute. He satisfies his desire as a half-man when he assumes the role of Nida's lover. The duality of being neither a man nor a woman or being both a man and a woman leads Bhanggi into the world's different territories. He ultimately seeks to find contentment in unexpected things just as developing a love affair with Nida which is considered a taboo in society because Bhanggi is a transgender. The same concept is emphasized by Ahmed (2007) mentioned above.⁴⁶

By delving deep into the chosen novel, it is found that Bhanggi is confused about his identity throughout the span of the story. His sexuality has become a question of identity just like Foucault

(1976)⁴⁷ has described in his works. During the whole narrative we can see two conflicting voices inside Bhanggi. “You talked of the dignity of the human spirit to a *Hijra*. After a lifetime of pain and shame, even now an outcast, I haven’t learnt the lesson the world is so sincerely trying to teach me.”⁴⁸ His disillusionment with his identity is not the source of such disputes. Perhaps it is the product of people’s lack of recognition of his queerness. His friend comments that Allah created *Hijra* as a creature unfit for happiness and love. Owing to his inability to reconcile with his inner sense of identity with his outer one, a deep sense of unhappiness overpowers him. “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; I die a little.”⁴⁹

Division of sex as a female and a male into two categories leaves Bhanggi uncertain about his identity. When he turns to fifteen, he develops a liking for a girl named Sheila. He is kicked out of “chawl”⁵⁰ after being caught red-handed in the house of Sheila at night. “Since I was a *Hijra*, I had no prerogative to create a choice. I was allowed to live—that was the debt my kind paid every day of our lives” (Mansab 2017, 44).⁵¹ While he wants to become a boy, he finally understands that he can never become one according to the society’s standards and values. Questions about his identity and life begin to haunt him. He is profoundly saddened by the fact he could never blend into normal society. A eunuch tells Bhanggi, “You want a woman but your body would never be that of a man” (Mansab 2017, 39).⁵² Bhanggi makes up his mind to live life the way he wants to, even though society’s brooding eyes have tormented him perpetually. He breaks away from the restraints put afore him by heteronormative Pakistani society. He develops a friendship with a begum known as Nida who accepts his identity. Bhanggi gets involved in Nida and restlessly awaits her visit to him though he is a marginalized character within a marginalized society. Under the sheer pressure of heterosexual norm, Nida is forced to think about the gender of Bhanggi. “Every time I saw him, I marveled at how unlike a *hijra* he looked. Yet, I knew that he was...the poor boy...not even boy, a *Hijra*.”⁵³

A male trapped in a female body, Bhanggi embraces a male’s identity and hopes to know his/her true self. “He hadn’t disguised himself with make-up. If he’d dressed like a woman, like other *Hijras*, he’d probably look like a young girl. Instead, he wore the green robes

of qalandars and discussed love and perfection with me.”⁵⁴ In the opinion of Butler (1990), we don't need to accept gender as being passively defined but "it is a method of constructing ourselves."⁵⁵ Body is called a locus of dialectical development and what has been engraved on the flesh gets a new collection of historical meaning in that process. Bhanggi discovers that the *Hijras* are a small group of people blessed with the power of cursing and blessing. But the irony is that living a normal life is restricted to the very same chosen people entrusted with this power.

Bhanggi is devoted to God. Even while being victimized and tagged as an outcast by the people around him, he comes close to Allah which demonstrates his indomitable will to survive against all the odds. "He is my only comfort when the night is darkest and my only listener, my constant companion."⁵⁶ In search of peace he wants to pray inside the mosque and for this he enters one but is ruthlessly banished out of it by a maulvi. According to the maulvi, transgenders are filthy and diseased creatures to whom entry in mosques is prohibited. "You filth of the earth. You rascal...get out now, you son of Iblis...you wicked being with wicked body. This Hijra is polluting mosque."⁵⁷ Here, the maulvi's behavior can be seen as the illustration of gender-normative and compulsory heterosexuality forced by the heteronormative Pakistani society. Bhanggi is regarded as deviant or abhorrent in the same way as Rich (1980) has described in her various works on marginalized sections.⁵⁸ Although the maulvi is opposed by a group of young boys in order to secure entrance for Bhanggi in the mosque, the maulvi cannot come out of the stereotypical gender construction maintained in Pakistani tradition and culture as when the maulvi says "That's holy spot, you dog. You're not even a dog, since a dog also has a gender. See at yourself, the face of woman and the torso of man ... what's down there, you Hijray?"⁵⁹ Bhanggi is humiliated beyond his worst nightmare. By experiencing prejudiced attitude and discrimination by the maulvi, Bhanggi is further alienated and stigmatized from society as well as is forced to adhere to the marginalized group of society to which he actually belongs.

If Bhanggi goes outside, people make mocking comments like "a stain on humanity"⁶⁰ and he is chased by young boys who throw stones on him, as well as sometimes chase him simply out of curiosity. These are some of the instances of the unkindness that

Bhanggi has to go through because he doesn't adhere to the rigid gender norms of society due to which he is involved in self-loathing. He is cautious of interacting with people like stigmatized people do according to Goffman (1963).⁶¹ "I'd never meant much anyway."⁶² People from mainstream society undergo a kind of humiliation and fear towards transgender. The general public spreads rumors against them as is detailed in the selected novel that mothers use to tell their children that transgenders kidnap children and are often possessed by a jinn or devil. "A maulvi once told me I was possessed by jinn."⁶³ (Mansab 2017, 214) "Homophobia"⁶⁴ refers to negative views and feelings towards homosexuality or people known or viewed as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. In her book *The Epistemology of the closet* (1990), Kosofsky criticizes this homophobia as baseless. Bhanggi is living with an identity which is blinded by negative perception in people's eyes. Piazza and Fasulo (2015) have highlighted the lives of such stigmatized people.⁶⁵

Bhanggi's encounter with the BBC reporter who has come to interview him brings to light how this ignored section of the society has been humiliated and victimized. This very episode highlights downgrading of the marginalized sections. The BBC reporter describes heteronormative Pakistani society and its disgust with transgenders. On being interrogated about his name and reason for residing in Daata Darbaar, Bhanggi's answers unmask the cruelty of brutal society and its inhumane treatment towards the transgenders. "They call me Bhanggi. I've forgotten what my name was...I live here because it gives me peace. I don't tell her it's because I have nowhere else to go."⁶⁶ The above lines signify Bhanggi's identity crisis and homelessness. The reporter Helen during her interview accused Bhanggi as "an addict of marijuana"⁶⁷ as her translator has told her the meaning of his name "Bhanggi." Being asked about castration put a final nail in the coffin by Helen. "Where you castrated? I shake my head, dropping my eyes. I cannot look at her. I feel suddenly ashamed again."⁶⁸

Though born intersex, in the creative hands of Mansab, Bhanggi becomes a very credible character. Under the horror of heterosexual norm of Pakistani society where there is no room for a gender queer, Bhanggi is abandoned by his family "They didn't need me. They didn't want the embarrassment which comes with me, a Hijra."⁶⁹ He is fostered by the *Hijra* community's *guru*, named Gulabo, yet he also

trades Bhanggi for small favors and concessions at an early age of eight to local police officers and shopkeepers. "I wasn't more than a commodity, an item to be bartered with few comforts: It's the only livelihood to which I have a right."⁷⁰ As Butler (2004) states, gendered violence against transgenders is not recognized as abuse or as violence; therefore Bhanggi is victimized and abused by society fearlessly.⁷¹ Bhanggi has been rejected and ignored by both family and society and faces serious identity problems. Bhanggi feels vexed and hampered. He has been abused and ridiculed just because of his identity since the beginning. Bhanggi asserts, "My body is not mine; it is a shared lustful instrument which seeks manifestation in back alleys. I'm like those gaps which is owned by nobody; a shameful emotion that has never been noticed."⁷² He's forced to categorize himself with females as well as dress like them. He sees himself as a demi-creature, an individual who is in between. That inner turmoil later compels him to wear a green mantle along with beads round his neck to proceed on a quest visiting dargahs⁷³ in God's search. Beaten half to death if he doesn't succumb to the lustful ownership of the Aufaaq clerk, he yearns for acceptance and identity. In order to be allowed to live at Daata Darbaar, Bhanggi has to pay the price in the guise of submitting to the orders of Auqaaf in the form of working as sex worker.

Bhanggi's gentle, kind, and loving soul shines through his body but he is caged inside. Bhanggi feels fascinated towards women and deep inside he feels apart from his community and other *Hijras*. This in a way is the greatest agony of his being. Bhanggi experiences a unique spiritual relationship with Nida. As the affiliation between Nida and Bhanggi develops, the fictional discourse emphasizes their routes of engaging with religious fervor and self-gratification. Both of them have similar fates: mistreated, annulled, deserted, and forced to feel inconsequential by their relatives, and a patriarchal and conformist social order.

The very term *Hijra* is often used in a derogatory way. Categorizing transgenders as "unnatural", "abnormal" and "deviant", the patriarchal society legalizes the heterosexual norm. Like normal individuals, transgenders are also human being with passions and wishes in their life. They also want to live as family but they cannot as society never sanctions their position. The love affair between Bhanggi and Nida is not acceptable in Pakistani society where a

transgender is not even considered as a normal being since recognition of transgenders always comes from society in Butler's (2004) viewpoint.⁷⁴ The novel ends with Bhanggi's brutal murder at the hands of goons sent by Nida's husband Saqib to avoid embarrassment. The people fail to recognize Bhanggi's feelings, emotions, and love for Nida simply because he is considered as misfit and outcast due to his gender identity. People who break societal norms are often targets of gendered violence according to Butler (2004)⁷⁵ and Bhanggi is no exception. "Bhanggi had been killed to avoid embarrassment, not because he was considered a threat. He had been killed to keep Saqib away from the idea of him, the anomaly, the disease, the abnormality".⁷⁶ And what could be worse that after being brutally killed, the police refused to hand over Bhanggi's body to the *Hijra* community. In the end he lived his entire life with an identity crisis, and left the world deprived of a proper burial.

Conclusion

The study scrutinizes the novel *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) by Faiqa Mansab through Queer theory of Judith Butler who describes in her masterpieces *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004) that gender is performative and violence towards transgender is not considered violence by this very world. By analyzing the text of the novel in details, the authors of this paper have brought to light various dialogues between Nida and Bhanggi, and Bhanggi's monologues which display his identity crisis throughout his mortal existence. Each of them signifies the struggle of a transgender to survive in a heteronormative Pakistani society. The study concludes that victimization, discrimination, and marginalization are experienced by transgender resulting from power structures within society that conforms to heteronormativity. They are subject to inhumane treatment on the basis of gender in the substructures of orthodox Pakistani society. Society ignores them and looks down upon them. They are even deprived of human status. They are never given a chance which is necessary to prove themselves and their life. The agonies and sufferings make them deteriorate and experience fear of the outer world.

The authors of this paper have studied the sufferings of transgenders in the selected novel through the character Bhanggi as well as real transgenders in Pakistan. It is deduced that the transgenders endure inequality in every area they could have come across. Most transgenders are experiencing penury, abuse, unemployment, unhomeliness, crime, etc. Because of this unfair treatment and injustice done to them, many of them fail to maintain basic essentials of existence. For survival, they are forced to engage in drug trafficking, sex work, and lack government legal protection. They suffer from loneliness as well as an identity crisis apart from all these torments. Gentle, kind and humble Bhanggi succumbs to the injustice of the society at the end of the novel simply because of not adhering to established societal norms. Identity can be seen as the heart of *This House of Clay and Water* (2017). Bhanggi's duality of gender, being a man and a woman at the same time or a Hijra limits his contentment. The muddled identity in his life evolves into a dungeon. By analyzing the novel minutely in light of Judith Butler's Queer theory, it is seen that there are no standards, rules, or stereotypes of gender as such as society engraves in the minds of the persons. As gender is a kind of performance as Butler said, so there is nothing called as essential gender-norm. Therefore, heterosexuality as the only norm is none other than a construction of patriarchal agenda. In other words, discrimination based on gender roles is an injustice that must be tackled or remedied.

Even though Ayan has several job offers now, she does not wish to stay in Pakistan anymore. Rather, through a scholarship in a European country, she hopes to find sanctuary. The plight of Ayan and Julie does highlight the fact that in Pakistan, transgender lives have become a living hell. In Pakistan, there is still a stigma associated to transgenders. As per their sexual behavior, they are examined and assessed. The primary reason of their misery has been their social, political, economic, and cultural exclusion. They are punished as they don't comply with stereotypical gender roles. In this article, the selected dramas, novel and film portray retribution as an outcome of breaching the gender binary. Whether its novel *This House of Clay and Water* (2017), film *Bol*, dramas *Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* and *Alif Allah Aur Insaan* or real life stories like those of Ayan and Julie, all point to the similar fate of transgender in heteronormative Pakistani society that is

murder/abuse/victimization/discrimination. Because Saifi and Bhanggi do not adhere to the stereotypical gender role, they are depicted as someone not normal, someone who isn't and cannot be embraced by society and whose ultimate destiny is to perish. In an attempt to deconstruct the myth of this oppressed segment, which perceives their individual status and identity via the lens of sex, the authors of this paper seek to establish the point that equal treatment is required. Data obtained for the study primarily portrays this community's social seclusion or denial. Their depiction in the chosen dramas, film and novel in their isolated houses and deprived lifestyles is a true representation of reality.

Notes

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- ¹ The word "Hijra" is used in Urdu language for transgender people.
- ² *Hijra* community is a secluded type of community where only transgender individuals live.
- ³ *Guru* is an Urdu word used for a leader, caretaker and trainer of transgenders.
- ⁴ "Other" is the concept first introduced by Simone de Beauvoir in her work "The Second Sex" to explain the workings of binary gender relation. Moreover, "other" is an individual who is regarded by the group as not belonging to or different in several fundamental ways.
- ⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid, 151.
- ⁸ Butler, *Undoing Gender*.
- ⁹ Ibid, 22.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 24.
- ¹¹ Ibid, 25.
- ¹² Butler, *Interviewed by Diana Tourjee*.
- ¹³ Goffman, *Stigma and social identity*, 11.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 14.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 84-97.
- ¹⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 04.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 10.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 21.
- ¹⁹ Rich, *Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence*, 631-660.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 633.
- ²¹ Ibid, 651.
- ²² Rubin, *Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality*.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 131.
- ²⁵ Ahmed, *Multiculturalism and the promise of happiness*, 121.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 126.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 130.
- ²⁸ Bischoff, *Passing the Test: The Transgender Body and Identity*.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 115.

- ³⁰ Piazza and Fasulo, *Marked Identities: Narrating lives between social labels and individual biographies*, 03.
- ³¹ Ibid, 05.
- ³² Ibid, 10.
- ³³ Ibid, 17.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 88.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Abdullah, "Is social exclusion pushing the Pakistani Hijras (Transgenders) towards commercial sex work? A qualitative study", 32.
- ³⁷ Ayan, Interview taken by Press Media in Karachi.
- ³⁸ Khan, interview on youtube.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ On August 16, protesters gathered in Islamabad to protest against unlawful arrest of Julie Khan.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Mansoor, Interviewed by Sabiha Samar.
- ⁴³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 65.
- ⁴⁶ Ahmed, *Multiculturalism and the promise of happiness*, 121.
- ⁴⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*.
- ⁴⁸ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 45.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 101.
- ⁵⁰ The word "chawl" is an Urdu word used for a large building divided into many separate tenements offering cheap accommodation to the poor people.
- ⁵¹ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 44.
- ⁵² Ibid, 39.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 143.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid, 142.
- ⁵⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31.
- ⁵⁶ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 100.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid, 110.
- ⁵⁸ Rich, *Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence*.
- ⁵⁹ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 111.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, 33.
- ⁶¹ Goffman, *Stigma and social identity*.
- ⁶² Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 259.
- ⁶³ Ibid, 214.
- ⁶⁴ Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*, 55.
- ⁶⁵ Piazza and Fasulo, *Marked Identities: Narrating lives between social labels and individual biographies*.
- ⁶⁶ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 77.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid, 78.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 79.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid, 6.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid, 7.
- ⁷¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*.
- ⁷² Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 15.
- ⁷³ The term "Dargah" is an Urdu word which means the tomb or shrine of a Muslim saint.

⁷⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Mansab, *This House of Clay and Water*, 266.

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