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Unmasking Cis-heteropatriarchy in Mansab's This House of Clay and Water

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Abstract

This study explores the persistent issue of gender marginalization within Pakistani society as portrayed in Faiqa Mansab's This House of Clay and Water. Despite growing discourse around gender and identity, the nuanced experiences of non-conforming individuals remain largely ignored in literary works. The novel offers valuable insight into how cis-heteropatriarchal norms suppress different genders and sexual orientations. The main objective of this research is to examine how Mansab's narrative challenges patriarchal authority and heteronormative standards. By focusing on key characters such as Bhanggi, a eunuch, and Nida, a repressed housewife, the study highlights how these individuals struggle within a system that silences them. It also aims to give space to voices often excluded from dominant narratives in South Asian literature. This qualitative study employs an interpretative and close textual analysis of the novel. Drawing on feminist and queer theoretical frameworks, the analysis investigates how the characters' lives show the impact of strict social rules and gender expectations. The study also explores how silence, inner struggles, and personal desires reveal the characters' need for freedom. The findings suggest that Mansab's novel challenges hegemonic masculinity by portraying the inner lives of marginalized individuals. The novel values non-traditional gender identities and shows how literature can help challenge unfair systems.

Key Words: *Cis-heteropatriarchy, gendered marginalization, heteronormativity, transphobia, hegemonic masculinity, gender diversity, intersectionality.*

Introduction

Faiqa Mansab, a Pakistani storyteller, is a leading voice in contemporary fiction. Her academic excellence earned her the prestigious British Chevening scholarship (2019-20). She holds a master degree in creative writing, and she has spoken at various events on literature, creative writing and women's right. Her academic achievements also include a degree in Gender and Cultural Studies from Birkbeck, University of London. The prominent themes of her writings include identity, intersectionality of gender, social issues and cultural values in South Asian context. Sufism is also subtly woven into her work. Her works, marked by emotional intensity and profundity, effectively shed light on all aspects of human life and capture its emotional depth. Her writing has been published in numerous regional and global media platforms. *The Sufi Storyteller*, a thought provoking novel, is her most recent creation, while her first literally offering was "*This House of Clay and Water*". This award winning novel was first published in 2017 and gained universal acknowledgement and acclaim. It reflects the brutal truths of a male dominated society highlighting androcentric beliefs, such as superiority of heterosexual men over individuals of others genders and sexual orientations, gender discrimination, women's subjugation and stigmatisation of LGBTQ+ individuals.

This House of Clay and Water by Faiqa Mansab offers an in-depth analysis of the lives of individuals confined by rigid cis-heteropatriarchal norms. In this novel, she presents a wide

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range of characters such as Nida, Sasha, Bhanggi, Chameli and Zoya. This work integrates the lives of these character into a cohesive narrative in order to explore the oppressive regime of cis-heteropatriarchy in modern Pakistani society.

Nida, a young woman from prestigious background, is tied to an empty and loveless marriage. Her husband is a typical product of cis-heteropatriarchial society and her life is governed by his commands. Along with that her in-laws also dictate her life, limiting her freedom and agency. This novel focuses on her inner conflict as she negotiates the suffocating grip of her marriage. As the narrative unfolds, Nida meets Sasha, another marginalised character. She is bold and blunt, as "her looks and her sensuality had made her fearless" (Mansab, 2023, p. 82). Sasha seeks affirmation through her extramarital affairs as she hooks up with different men. This shows her yearning for self-discovery and identity. Though her relationships are deal-oriented, they showcase objectification of women's bodies in a social setup that sees women as commodities of lust. Nida notices Sasha's challenges and figures out that both of them are entrapped in a system that constraints their authority. Sasha's profile serves as an antithesis to Nida's. While Nida is tied to traditional roles, Sasha exemplifies a more empowered yet similar restricted figure. Despite their distinctions, they establish a connection. They both critique the institution of marriage by presenting it as another social construct. As Nifa confesses to Sasha:

> Marriage is a crux of stability in society, a function. It doesn't mean anything. It's just a social contract to enable legitimate children. It's not a choice. for generation after generation women have fallen into marriages and motherhood like sleepwalkers, like you did, like I did. (Mansab, 2023, p. 203)

Additionally, the novel presents transgender characters who face severe exclusion due to their non-conformity to binary gender expectations. Bhanggi, a eunuch, is the wretched of the earth, having no personal identity and dignity. He is spurned by the society and his existence is considered lethal by cis-heteropatriarchal society that usually cherishes heterosexuality. Through experiences of these characters, Mansab uncovers the rigid framework of cis-heteropatriarchy, a system that marginalizes and silences women as well as transgender communities. To sum up all, this novel provides an in-depth analysis of the lives of underrepresented communities in modern Pakistani society. It questions the validity of prevailing social and cultural norms, highlighting the need to redefine them.

Cis-heteropatriarchy is a multilayered societal structure that favours cisgender, heterosexual males by placing them at the zenith of hierarchical power. It benefits them from structural power while disregarding others to inferior position in every walk of life. This system brings with it toxic masculinity as reward for those who conform to such rules, while punishment for those who challenge these rules. Traditional gender roles are forcefully regulated in this setup expecting conformity to gender binaries. Annamarie Jagose's queer theory, in his book *Queer Theory: An Introduction (1996)*, offers a critical perspective for challenging established standards that supports cis-heteropatriarchy. This theoretical framework questions conventional and rigid standards of gender and sexuality, asserting that personal identities are not fixed; rather, they are performative and culturally influenced. This system cherishes heterosexuality and often compels women into heterosexual relationships. Similarly LGBTQ+ individuals are also forced to mask their identities in order to avoid social isolation. Ultimately, it spotlights the overlapping system of patriarchy, heterosexism and transphobia as the ways of oppression that mutually support and strengthen each other.

Statement of the problem

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There is a profound impact of cis-heteropatriarchal oppression over social and cultural norms within South Asian societies. This embedded discrimination not only prevailed within institutional frameworks but also prolonged through literature, press and cultural narratives. These dynamics are skillfully presented in this novel through the lived experiences of different characters. Regardless of the worldwide feminist awakening and queer narratives, literary works from South Asia remain obscure in relation to the presentation of non-traditional sexualities and intersection of patriarchy. The problem that this study aims to resolve is the limited critical analysis on how South Asian literary works specifically *This House of Clay and Water*, states the multilayered and generally stark realities of entities that oppose and refuse to conform to rigid social standards. Through a cis-heteropatriarchal framework, this study evaluates how novel unveils the power dynamics by means of which patriarchy controls identity, perpetuates toxic masculinity, and represses different genders and sexual orientations, contributing to a naused understanding of the manners in which narrative fiction can both mirror and question structural injustice.

Research Questions

1. What is cis-heteropatriarchy?
2. How different genders and sexual orientations are marginaliszed in patriarchal societies?
3. How does cis-heteropatriarchal opperssion shape characters' experiences in the novel?

Research Objectives

1. To understand the concept of cis-heteropatriarchy.
2. To analyse framework of patriarchal dominance on different genders and sexual orientations.
3. To decipt the impact of cis-heteropatriarchal oppression on the lives of marginalized groups in the novel.

Literature Review

Faiqa Mansab's novel, *This House of Clay and Water*, has received significant scholarly attention since its publication. Many scholars have analyzed the novel through diverse lenses. This review of literature also sheds light on those literary works that address the notion of cis-heteropatriarchy.

Nadeem and Javed (2020) analyze this novel through Judith Butler's queer theory. Their article highlights the transgender's oppression, inequality, and gender discrimination. Transgender individuals usually get inhuman treatment in heteronormative society. They are persistently disrespected and failed to acknowledge. Through the character of Bhanggi the researchers debates that he is exploited and marginalized throughout his life due to his inability to fit in a fixed biological gender. He is even deprived of human status in Pakistani society. It is determined that the transgender people withstand discrimination in every work of life. To survive, such marginalized people are compelled to engage in illicit drug trade and sex work

Saeed and Rehman (2021) analyze this work through the Existential feminist lens in the context of Simone de Beauvoir's theory. They use qualitative and descriptive analysis of the text and explain how women are treated as *others*. They illuminate the struggles of women with patriarchy, existentialist crisis and estrangement. Through this article, they demonstrate how the female character, Nida, feels suffocated and imprisoned within her own home, producing a feeling of dissatisfaction, existentialist crisis and alienation.

Abbas, Aurangzeb, and Hassan (2022) interpret the novel from feminist perspective by using qualitative research methodology. They explore various aspects of exploitation and

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marginalization of women through the character of Nida and others. Such characters are bound to rigid social and cultural norms, facing plenty of obstacles in a patriarchal society. In this article, the researchers inquire the elements responsible for the violation of women empowerment and women's subjugation to the system.

Raza, Rashid, and Malik (2022) use feminist post-structural discourse analysis (FPDA) and Judith Butler's queer theory for analyzing this novel. Their article examines the complex dynamics of identity, sexism, abuse and discourse in the text. They argue that gender is not biologically determined, but rather it is socially constructed, especially in Pakistani societies. It evaluates how language and cultural discourse promote normative violence and discrimination. Bhanggi and Nida navigate their identities within social constraints, highlighting the effects of cultural violence and flexibility of gender norms. Ultimately, this research article enriches the understanding of gender studies.

Fatima and Khan (2024) analyze that how intersex individuals face challenges and how they are treated in Pakistani society, by examining the character of Bhanggi in this novel. The researchers use Freud's psychoanalytic theory in order to understand his feelings. The study discloses that the the intersex characters suffer in society due to their inability of fitting into a specific gender such as Bhanggi. This research gives a powerful message about how such people undergo challenges of being mistreated and ignored by the society and focuses on equal rights of intersex individuals.

Nida Tariq (2024) explorers that how Faiqa Mansab's novel uses space to challenge gender roles. The study uses Judith Butler's concept from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. The research shows that how different characters like men, women and transgender individuals are placed in different spaces. The study reveals the identity crisis of characters who are stuck in fixed gender limitations. The researcher tries to deconstruct all these boundaries related to gender. It also highlights an important message that these gender boundaries create confusion within individuals and these roles need not to be fixed.

Sundus Nadeem's research article (2024) examines the representation of woman-folk within the framework of patriarchal Pakistani society as portrayed in this novel. This article seeks to reveal the multiple phases of womanhood, focusing on how females are oppressed and marginalized under social norms, household responsibilities, and spousal roles. It uses Simone de Beauvoir's feminist framework, specifically from her trailblazing masterpiece, *The Second Sex,* to evaluate the challenges confronted by female protagonists like Nida and Sasha. This research article explores the notable themes such as sexual abuse, gender stereotyping, and psychological and emotional struggles that females bear because of public scrutiny. It discloses the brutal truths regarding the lives of women, focusing on the need of understanding and improvement in a system that keeps enforcing rigid norms on woman-folk. It offers an in-depth analysis of the troubling impacts of male dominance on women's lives.

Iqbal, Ayaz, and Riffat (2025) examine how this novel challenges conventional gender roles. This study implies Nicola Rivers' work of *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of Fourth Wave: Turning Tides* in order to understand that how novel portraits men, women and transgender individuals. The novel presents a balanced view of genders; not showing women as always fragile and men as always powerful or strong. The findings of this study shows that the author presented a true and fair portrayal of genders; showing an urgent need to give a second thought to all the conventional roles fixed for every gender.

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Fatima and Riaz (2025) study that how transgender's experiences have been represented in contemporary South Asian fiction. This research is focused on three novels: *Narcopolis, This House of Clay and Water* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness.* The researchers apply Frey Lawrence R's framework to explore the real-life issues encountered by transgender individuals such as being rejected by the society or denial when it comes to health rights. This research finds that how these deprived characters encounter such issues and also emphasizes on giving them their due rights. The researchers stress upon the fact that literature can bring positive changes in the society and promote the rights of transgender people.

The research article by Sage A. Malden (2023) examines the growing rates of LGBTQ+ restrictive laws in the United States that perpetuates cis-heteropatriarchal values, privileging heterosexual relationships and gender stereotyping. These laws are not only result in silencing LGBTQ+ voices but also deny them their basic dignity. He believes that the notion of cis-heteropatriarchy, stemming from critical feminist narratives, defines a social structure that benefits cisgender heterosexual males whereas disregarding women and non-binary individuals. This research focuses on the need for Human Resource Development (HRD) education to students to promote awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), harmonizing the societal issues confronted by queer individual in educational progress. This article claims that HRD education has a significant impact on building diverse and inclusive cultures, questioning the constructed norms of cis-heteropatriarchy.

Methodology

This study employs an interpretative, qualitative research methodology to examine the novel *This House of Clay and Water*. By employing a tactic based on the study of meaning, interpretative qualitative research empowers a detailed insight of the incidents, characters, and subject matters within the novel. This structure is very useful for evaluating interconnected social systems of a literary work. This framework allows the researchers to look behind the facade and uncover the hidden truths. By examining the novel from cis-heteropatriarchal theoretical perspective, this methodology helps in finding the ways through which gender, sexuality, class, and power dynamics are created, strengthened, and ultimately challenged. Eventually, this framework reveals the underlying social dynamics and helps in amplifying underrepresented voices in the novel. Overall, this methodological framework is beneficial for the multidimensional analysis of the novel.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research article is based on the idea of cis-heteropatriarchy. This notion of cis-heteropatriarchy is originally derived from queer theory and then later adopted by feminist scholars and researchers. It explores the intersecting systems of power that favor cisgender, heterosexual males while marginalizing others, particularly women and transgender individuals, in patriarchal societies. This theoretical framework exposes the systematic inequality through the lived experiences of oppressed communities. By employing this concept, the study evaluates cultural and social norms that are prevailing in the society. It also shows how these norms and conventions are opposed by different characters in the novel.

Cis-heteropatriarchy acts as a powerful strategy and framework for imposing fixed notion of masculinity and femininity on individuals. It reinforces conventional gender roles and consistently disadvantages those who refuse to fit into such roles, as depicted in the novel. It normalizes male-centric power in every public, private and civil sphere. Thus, it reinforces the superiority of cisgender males over other genders and sexual orientations. This social setup

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values heterosexuality and considers it as normative lifestyle which undermines non-conventional sexualities. Moreover, this system forces women into heterosexual relationships because society sees them as the only socially accepted form of intimacy. Societies that are based on cis-heteropatriarchal values, reject other relationships that are outside this existing structure. Thus, it creates biasness and transphobia.

Additionally, cis-heteropatriarchy features the interlocking nature of different systems of oppression that support and strengthen each other, such as patriarchy, heterosexism, and transphobia. It shapes the lives of disadvantaged communities by telling them how should they dress, behave, communicate, and exist in the society. These roles are acting as tools of power that seek to maintain a binary system of gender and sexuality, and not just social expectations. In reaction to such repressive environment, marginalized communities persistently grapple with identity issues, resistant and endurance. Using this framework, the research examines how literature captures these patterns of oppression and how individuals cope with and question the constraints placed on them by cis-heteropatriarchal society.

Analysis

What was more tragic, the lives people lived, or the deaths they died?

~ Faiqa Mansab

Throughout the literary timeline, starting from Classical Greek drama to Roman epics and later literary traditions, the suppression of women and individuals outside the gender binary has been a common subject matter. These traditional interpretations mirror social framework wherein patriarchal and cis-heteronormative ideas have continuously reinforced masculine hegemony while marginalizing those who deviate from traditional gender norms. Within this framework, present day fiction continues to confront the deep-rooted legacies of inequality. This persistent gender-based marginalization is echoed in modern narrative of Faiqa Mansab, where the lives of women and transgender individuals are molded and influenced by cis-heteronormative expectations.

This article explores a critical analysis of cis-heteropatriarchy as depicted in the novel, giving special attention to the subjugation of women and transgender individuals. By analyzing the plot, symbolic interpretation, and social hierarchies of the novel, it explores the ways through which it questions and defies the cis-heteropatriarchal values. It also reveals the resilience tactics and the psychological impact of such oppression on the lives of different characters. Based on this outline, this analysis ultimately intends to augment the ongoing discussion regarding identity, gender, sexuality and power dynamics.

Faiqa Mansab, in her novel, points out the psychological, social and existential impact of this system by the intertwining lives of different characters: Nida, Sasha, Zoya, Bhanggi and Chameli. Nida, although a cisgender woman having high socioeconomic status, is imprisoned within the role of a dutiful and submissive partner and emotionally controlled mother. Nida epitomizes the role that cis-heteropatriarchal society assumes women to fulfill. She is educated and young. She is married to Saqib, who is a politician. She lives her life strictly according to the expectations of the society.

Even before marriage, Nida's life is influenced by the confining norms of cis-heteropatriarchy, which start indoctrinating women from a very young age to personify silence, obedience, and self-sacrifice. Within her privileged family, femininity is controlled rather than celebrated; displaying feminine traits such as bangles, henna tattoos, nose pins or interacting in a way that may draw male attention are considered inappropriate for 'respectable girls'. Nida, being the

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representative of girls from "good families", was expected to suppress any attribute that could be seen seductive or amorous. This forced modesty makes the female body as a source of potential shame, equating modesty with social worth. In contrast to her classmates who freely obsessed over actors, singers, and local lads, Nida was withheld even from this harmless emotional release. She fantasized about love and romance through fictional characters, a gentle yet powerful sign of her emotional disconnection and detachment from genuine human relations.

Additionally, Nida's engagement to Saqib was promised without her approval, strengthening the concept that her personal decisions were not her own to make. It was the patriarchal male in shape of her father that decided for her, even in case of love and marriage: "his family had come by with a proposal six years ago, which my parents had accepted on my behalf, without consulting me" (Mansab, 2023, p. 2). She also confessed to Bhanggi "I married the one I was told to marry and made myself love him" (Mansab, 2023, p.118). She had no agency of her own and her individuality was curtailed by the cisgender males. As a result of these initial experiences, this novel analyzes how cis-heteropatriarchy shapes women into powerless individuals and mere subjects whose lives and identities are handled long before adulthood.

Marriage fails to liberate Nida from the emotional impacts of her family dynamics, rather it intensified them under the pressure of marital responsibilities and societal demands. As a wife, Nida is supposed to carry out the role of a speechless, graceful woman. Her husband does not provide partnership or bonding, but handles the marriage as an institutional framework. Nida's relationship with her husband is filled with emotional gap and distress in the outward exhibition of success. It deepens her sense of isolation where her emotional and perceptive needs are continuously ignored. The details of her personal life are exposed when she says "sometimes I wished I could just vanish, evaporate" (Mansab, 2023, p. 3). She is treated not as a human but a mere decorative figure therefore she spends most of her time outside the house because of that emotional void. Even at house she feels herself as a ghost, straying from room to room and her loneliness disintegrated her. As she says "I avoided going home for as long as I could. There was no one to miss me at home" (Mansab, 2023, p. 60). So, she prefers going to a local shrine, Daata Sahib Daragh, instead of staying at home.

Nida's longing for intimacy and physical relation is perceived as illogical and indecent. Even Saqib treats her as an outsider, just like all other members of Familia Horribilus, lacking any kind of emotional support towards her. He treats her as an option rather than a priority as he himself says that he loves her but his family will always come first. These curbs and boundaries by the society of being submissive, regulated and denial of her agency turned into emotional detachment of her adult life. Through Nida's marital journey, this novel exposes the cis-heteropatriarchal structures that entrap women in to a void of feelings and emotional deprivation, where women's rights are curtailed and their lives are dictated by cisgender heterosexual males of the society.

In contrast to Nida, who exemplifies the silent victim of cis-heteropatriarchal traditions and norms, Sasha symbolizes a woman who deliberately challenges the constraints inflicted upon her gender. She defies conventional norms of the society but still remains bound by the societal expectations. She is bold, outspoken and iconoclastic figure. She is a middleclass housewife with two children. She is supposed to display modesty and devoted motherhood- a perfect woman and symbol of femininity shaped by the society that favors cisgender heterosexual male supremacy. Nevertheless, Sasha denies to be curtailed to this restricted persona. She smokes, drinks, involves in extramarital affairs- all actions that question the patriarchal setup. She regularly meets wealthy

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men in order to enable her lavish lifestyle. She is the epitome of seductive temptations as Mansab says "Sasha was the very personification of all forbidden thrills" (Mansab, 2023, p. 19). Sasha longs for vibrancy and excitement instead of patiently tolerating her household life. This reflects the emotional detachment and a sense of isolation that most of the women face in traditional marriages, leaving little to no space for self-expression. Sasha's avowal, "I feel stagnant at home. Why is life so boring?" (Mansab, 2023, p.18), reveals the emotional struggle of living within the constraints of patriarchal norms. Her feeling of stagnation represents not only physical imprisonment but also mental and emotional entrapment. The boredom she encounters is not insignificant; it turns into a gentle subversion, challenging the notion of domestic bliss. Through Sasha's discontent, Mansab evaluates how these social constructs segregate women from their own identity, making their lives feel stagnant and dull.

The conversation between Sasha and Faheem presents the striking reality of gender expectations that are deeply rooted within cis-heteropatriarchy. Faheem advocates his fidelity towards his wife by saying that she worships him and names her "a good wife" (Mansab, 2023, p.17), even here, his actions are not powered by mutual devotion but rather a relationship based on dominance and submission. He admires his wife not because of her individuality, but because of her conformity to the role that androcentrism assigns to wives. Sasha's sharp retort, referring to Odysseus, evaluates this sense of entitlement that men feel liberated to explore and cheat by satisfying their desires and still expecting fidelity from their partners. She ridicules this illusion by saying that if a man cheats on his wife whenever he gets the means, then it is illogical and absurd to demand unwavering loyalty in return. Through Sasha's voice, this moment exposes the essence of cis-heteropatriarchy: it not only favors cisgender heterosexual males, but also establishes a comprehensive ethical structure that rationalizes their freedom while restricting others.

As Simone de Beauvoir, in her book The Second Sex, talks about this notion that society privileges men by saying that men are the subjects, while women are considered as the Other. These words convey the idea that throughout the history, patriarchal societies have placed men as the standard representation of humanity and center of meaning and power. While on the other hand, women are regarded as subordinate and defined solely in relation to men. Beauvoir asserts that women are treated as second sex and not as self-governing individuals having their own identity. Women have assigned roles that marginalize them and make them barely visible in social, academic and political spheres of life. This notion parallels to the theory of cis-heteropatriarchy, which refers to a societal structure that privileges cisgender heterosexual men while women such as Nida and Sasha in the novel, and LGBTQ+ individuals like Bhanggi and Chameli are sidelined and spurned by such society. They are made to feel like other. Thus cis-heteropatriarchy is a web of intersecting operations, reinforcing systemic injustices.

Nida and Sasha's paths intersect at a local shrine, Daata Dargah. Two women meet each other despite of belonging to two completely different backgrounds. Their encounter is not coincidental, but almost spiritual: both pull towards shrine not by faith, but by the inner void. They relate and sympathize each other as both of them are marginalized by the cis-heteropatriarchal society. They are made to play the role of a dutiful wife and devoted mother. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949), while exploring gender-based violence and structured injustice, debates that society expects women to adopt the rigid feminine roles which are resonating with the ways cis-heteropatriarchy imposes gender identity norms. She rebukes the established notion of femininity, highlighting how it curbs women's liberty. Both of them form a wordless bond of sisterhood through their shared pain. At the shrine, Nida also encounters Bhanggi, a eunuch. He

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is another wretched soul who is completely marginalized by the cis-heteronormative society. As both of them are seeking some sense in their lives, so they share a strong bond with each other through the course of the novel.

In rigid cis-heteropatriarchal setup, LGBTQ+ people, specifically transgender individuals, prevail on the fringes of social acceptance. Their presence is considered as a hazard to the traditional gender binaries and they are often subjected to force, brutality and social exclusion. Rather than being accepted for their real selves, they are treated even harshly by the male dominated society. In this novel, the character of Bhanggi optimizes the stark realities of such oppression and marginalization. Just like Nida and Sasha, Bhanggi is another victim of the societal structures that uphold androcentric norms. Bhanggi's confession catches this harsh reality with painful honesty: "My body, ji, isn't my own. It's a communal vessel for lust that finds expression in dark corners" (Mansab, 2023, p. 6). His words provoke the commodification and suppression confronted by transgender individuals because of the patriarchal society that exploits their bodies. Thus, his existence acts as a form of resistance to the society.

Bhanggi's life starts with hardships, struggles and rejection instead of affection, emotional support, and acceptance. He is even rejected by his own family at birth and left swaddled in a dirty blood-stained cloth at the entrance of Daata's Dargah. His existence in this world is like an unwanted burden and a mark of dishonor for his family to bear. The only glimmer of compassion and care comes from Gulabo, the master or the guru of transgender community. She welcomes him and gives him a shelter not because of unconditional love, but under the facade of future benefits and potential gains. While she takes care of him, her care and support are conditional and based on reciprocity. She is the one who sells him for the very first time when Bhanggi is eight years old. She treats his body as a commodity, objectifying him for gaining profit. As in the novel, Bhanggi says "Gulabo took care of me. She was also the one who sold me for the first time, when I was eight. I was nothing more than an investment" (Mansab, 2023, p. 8). From a very young age, he understands that survival needs compromise, complete submission and exploitation. His body becomes an adoptable vessel that can be rented, utilized and handed back when opportune. He is stripped of agency and only viewed as an object, highlighting how society not only marginalizes such entities but also commodifies and exploits them. His narrative holds a universal relevance and resonates beyond himself; it is representative of the systematic violence and oppression encountered by transgender people in a cis-heteropatriarchal society.

The event where Nida, being pregnant for the first time, encounters a eunuch in the novel, presents a powerful representation of Judith Butler's idea of unintelligible subject, as depicted in her iconic publication Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990). As a transgender individual walks up to her, Nida's mother-in-law yelps and gives a peculiar comment laden with fear, disgust and irrational thoughts, "Don't look at him. Your child will be one too, if you do" (Mansab, 2023, p. 31). This response discloses the deep-seated fears and tensions encircling non-traditional gender binaries. These gender non-conforming individuals are not just disregarded but also demonized, considered as a bad omen, a hazard to the traditional gender norms and heteronormativity. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender is not something fixed, rather it is performance. Within the heteropatriarchal framework, these performances are rigidly practiced and those identities who do not conform to these structural norms are deemed erroneous or even hideous. Thus, this incident captures the essence of Butler's theory by reflecting how the underlying system of cis-heteropatriarchy functions to marginalize and demonize gender non-conforming individuals who endanger its delicate framework.

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Bhanggi's confrontation with societal brutality and cultural violence demonstrates that marginalization faced by such transgender people is systematic and multilayered. The Daata's Dargah, that is supposed to be a place of divine benevolence, becomes a new domain of exclusion for Bhanggi. He is kicked out from there and beaten by people but still he manages to stay at the shrine, resisting societal expectations. Bhanggi himself narrates this incident as, "The authorities at the dargah were outraged. They kicked me out. I came back. They beat me. I wouldn't budge. They got tired after a while. I have stayed ever since" (Mansab, 2023, p. 53). His presence questions the validity of social customs and traditions that try to wipe him out. He gains the understanding of life not from a privileged journey but from going through hardships. These episodes highlight the dehumanization of transgender people by cis-heteropatriarchal society that tries to drain their vitality and strip off their souls. Still his journey reflects the resistance, search for meaning and demands to be seen.

Bhanggi's tale, as well as other transgender individuals such as Rani and Chameli, undercovers the harsh realities of living in a cis-heteropatriarchal society that refuses queer identities any room for self-expression. Bhanggi claims that desires are not connected with transgender people. This shows a deep-rooted belief that such marginalized individuals should stay emotionally detached and spiritually subservient in order to be accepted in this society. Despite of being born as an anomaly and disregarded at birth, people like Bhanggi and Chameli are supposed to be pious and to embody piety. Mansab expresses this belief as, "Even hijras must retain a pious asexual facade in this judgmental society" (Mansab, 2023, p. 63). This enforced chastity is further highlighted by the character of Chameli, who is also forced to be righteous, simply to be ultimately butchered. This incident serves as a vivid representation of this society that first exploits and then excludes gender nonconforming individuals.

Nevertheless, gender-diverse individuals are not only excluded by such society but they are also exposed to physical abuse and public humiliation. Bhanggi himself is violently harmed by a man at the shrine who boots him in the stomach and slaps him several times across his face. He also hurls abusive slurs such as harami, kutte and useless hijra, warning to kick him out of Daata's Dargah and into a randi khana, a whorehouse. People stood in silence, forming a hesitant circle. One of the men's derogatory remarks, "Why should I interfere for a hijra?" (Mansab, 2023, p. 73), highlight the collective disregard for hijras' basic rights and societal indifference toward their sufferings. These episodes of public shaming and brutal dismissal illuminate how hijras' bodies are objectified and dehumanized by the cis-heteropatriarchal society. As a response to this public humiliation and persistent dehumanization, Bhanggi seeks out Kabbadiya, questioning "Why did He create me and others like me?" (Mansab, 2023, p.76). Even within the sacred places like that of Daata's Dargah, he is expelled and marginalized. Bhanggi's soliloquy reflects his soul's agony:

> 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 will bring it, I die a little. (Mansab, 2023, p. 120)

The interaction between Bhanggi and Mullah, the head of a mosque, clearly unveils the deep-seated dishonesty within the religious establishment because they are expected to show compassion and mercy. Even Mullah lashes out verbally, calling him a rascal, a profane creature, and ultimately filth, instead of providing refugee and shelter. His words, "You are not even a dog, because a dog has a gender too" (Mansab, 2023, p. 133), not only deny his humanity but

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also of existence adhering to binary gender spectrum that society cherishes. This incident reveals how holy places that are often associated with divine mercy, turn into continuations of cis-heteropatriarchal dominance. Even here, transgender individuals are considered as outcast and not only rejected physically, but also spiritually, as if they are not worthy enough of having the basic right of recognition.

Bhanggi's encounter with Nida shakes up the heteronormative boundaries that society defends vigorously. Nida, being a cisgender woman, finds physical comfort and emotional support with Bhanggi, an intersex person. This challenges the notion of conventional expectations of gender and desire. The connection they have is considered forbidden, so they keep it hidden from everyone in their surroundings. Nida is imprisoned in a heterosexual relationship with Saqib, a bond defined by social norms and traditions. As Adrienne Rich (1980) says that heterosexuality is considered as "normal" and "default" way of life, which harms women and other marginalized genders. She presented the term "compulsory heterosexuality" to explain how society compels women into heterosexual relationships. She argues that society often ignores the voices of marginalized groups. Nida, emotionally detached from her husband who only dictates her, is drawn towards Bhanggi who acknowledges her.

Bhanggi's devastating end becomes the ultimate repercussion of a cis-heteronormative society that denies to accept people surpassing heteronormative limitations. He understands the fact that this world will never permit such a relationship between a complete cisgender woman and an intersex. Hence, their shared bond is viciously destroyed when Nida's husband, Saqib, gets to know about them. Four men, on command of Saqib, drag Bhanggi to a dark corner and beat him to death. They use abusive word for him like hijray, kanjjar, harami, assaulted him brutally and eventually killed him. His death is planned under the guise of binary order and 'honor', highlighting how cis-heteropatriarchal society ultimately eradicate gender nonconforming individuals.

Parallel to this, the life incidents of Zoya, Sasha's younger daughter, reveal the ruthless enforcement of cis-heteropatriarchy where discretion, humiliation and subversion are enforced on female genders from early age. She is refused compassion and warmth thus she ultimately absorbs in books, "sobbing and hiccupping until she fell asleep" (Mansab, 2023, p. 109). It is because of the seclusion she faced. Zoya's rape by Idrees, her neighbor, reveals another dark side of cis-heteropatriarchal society: the normalization of abuse and gender-based violence. Her harassment is forced into silence not only by the abuser, Idrees, who threatens her not to tell anyone about it, but also by woman such as Razia. Razia's reaction is depicted in the novel as, "Razia only glared back at her and shook her head. Then she put her finger on her lips to indicate silence" (Mansab, 2023, p. 216). Zoya accepts her fate without any doubt and does not raise any question. This shows her insignificance in a world that teaches girls to bear pain instead of resisting. Her sufferings become habitual; "She couldn't utter a word. Wasn't that the rule? This was how she lived, pleasing other people for scraps of affection. That was all she knew" (Mansab, 2023, p. 217). This alarming normalization of violence and torture, as a norm, shows how cis-heteropatriarchal society systematically teaches girls to adopt silence and subversion instead of resistance.

Nida's final breakdown is not just an instant of personal sufferings and emotional anguish. Rather, it is shared grief and mourning for all those marginalized individuals that are silenced and rejected by cis-heteropatriarchal society. Her tears are for Bhanggi, Chameli, Zoya, Fatima,

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her deceased daughter, and also for herself. Each one of them has a story to tell and assigned a life with no dignity, voice and agency. Nida herself reveals this:

> I wanted to cry for Zoya, Chameli, Bhanggi and myself. People like Saqib and Sasha, Kyla, these were the people who knew how to live: they were the strong ones. People like me, Zoya, Bhanggi, we should've been left in a spiritual coldstorage. Life was too hard for us. (Mansab, 2023, p. 237)

This spiritual cold-storage is a place in which cis-heteronormative setup places such individuals that are rejected by it. Thus, Nida cries for herself and countless others who are buried under the weight of social expectations.

Through these overlapping stories, this novel reveals not only the verbal and physical abuse over such individuals, stemming from heteronormative structure, but also its lasting psychological damage. This novel vehemently criticizes the rigid societal setup that marginalizes those entities who differ from established identities and traditional roles, resulting in deep emotional and spiritual exile. As Nida, fed up with this repressive social setup, admits that she knows about silence and pain. She confesses, "I no longer recognized myself. I feared that one day, even if I wanted to, I wouldn't be able to identify myself" (Mansab, 2023, p. 98), reflecting her alienation from self and identity crisis. Not only Nida but Bhanggi also internalizes this oppression, calling himself as 'a pitiful half creature' by adopting victim mentality. Their shared experiences describe a system that is not in favor of giving any space to non-conforming genders. Eventually, this literary masterpiece becomes a lament, not only for the lost connections, but also for the lives they are assigned to live.

Conclusion

The current research finds out the complicated mechanism of cis-heteropatriarchy as depicted in the narrative prose This House of Clay and Water written by Faiqa Mansab. This study stems from a core question that what comprises cis-heteropatriarchy, a social system which gives preference to cisgender heterosexual males and marginalizes all other genders and sexual orientations. Moreover, it also delves into the lives of the novel's characters and examine how their lives' experiences are shaped and influenced by cis-heteropatriarchal oppression. The core findings of this research are to understand the concept of cis-heteropatriarchy and to investigate the mechanism of patriarchal oppression. It reveals the emotional toll such as anxiety, depression, psychological imbalance as the outcomes of such systematic operation on the characters. This literary creation examines the ways through which different gender non-conforming individuals deal with violence, abuse, emotional turmoil and segregation, by portraying a wide range of characters such as Nida, Sasha, Zoya, Bhanggi, and Chameli. Nida's inner battle with her restricted role as a mother and wife, Sasha's resistant to social norms and quest for liberty, Bhanggi as well as Chameli's devastating end as a transgender person, and Zoya's painful memory of sexual abuse, all show how cis-heteropatriarchal values mold their destinies. Ultimately, this research tries to find the connection between gender identity and sexual orientation with that of authority and dominance.

This research is based on the theory of cis-heteropatriarchy that is originally rooted in queer theory. It serves as a core component for understanding this patriarchal setup. Focusing on Adrienne Rich's philosophical idea of compulsive heterosexuality (1980), this research evaluates how heterosexuality is considered as 'normal' and 'default' way of life and is imposed on individuals. Simone de Beauvoir's work (1949) highlights the gendered marginalization and systematic injustice, further strengthening the evaluation of how cis-heteropatriarchal setup

allocates strict gender roles to females and other socially excluded groups. Theory of gender performativity (1990), by Judith Butler, also aids to investigate that gender is a dynamic act and not a fixed trait. Thus, this novel seamlessly captures the entrenched impacts of cis-heteropatriarchal dominance on individuals with the help of these theoretical models.

By enlightening the notion of cis-heteropatriarchy, this research contributes to the advancement of the contemporary academic discourse on gender identity, sexual orientation, and power dynamics. Moreover, this study also functions as a doorway for ongoing investigation on the delicate matter of gender-based violence within South Asian society. Furthermore, analyzing this novel through a queer theoretical perspective sets the stage for a holistic examination of how gender, sexuality, and class converge in the experiences of disadvantaged communities. Although this research is confined to a single work, it still provides a structure that can be expanded to various South Asian written works. Evaluating this journey, it is evident that the sufferings of novel's characters are not just fictional, rather they reflect the real-life experiences of oppressed communities in such heteronormative societies. The emotional complexity in the novel and deep questioning leaves a lasting impression on readers regarding power and ideologies. As Nida asks a question that encompasses the essence of this research: the blurring of lines between divine and masculine authority, "Was I confusing patriarchy with God? Were they the same?" (Mansab, 2023, p. 205).

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