



THE EXISTENTIAL ALIENATION OF THE FEMININE SELF IN *THIS HOUSE OF CLAY AND WATER* BY FAIQA MANSAB

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The present study aims to analyze the text *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) by Mansab, through the Existentialist Feminist lens in the light of Simone de Beauvoir's theory as explained in her revolutionary work, *The Second Sex* (2009). The purpose of the study is not only to highlight women's oppression/ *othering* in marriage due to patriarchy but also to mark the role of the 'husband' as crucial to the understanding of women's emotional abandonment in marriage.

Methodology: The study is qualitative and uses a descriptive analysis of the selected text. The method of literary analysis used in the text is based on a *close reading* of the narrative description and events of alienation of the *identity persona* of the protagonist in the text.

Main Findings: The present study draws on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas about how women are treated as *others* by the male *subject* in marriage resulting in a feeling of frustration, identity loss alienation, and existential crisis. Moreover, the role of the husband is crucial to avoid this crisis in women after marriage.

Application of the study: This study can have many applications in various fields. The study demonstrates the impacts of social and cultural stereotypes on women as well as the role of patriarchy and resulting alienation. This study can have many applications in gender and feminist studies. This study can also be helpful in the academic setting for research purposes especially in feminism, gender studies, and female existentialism.

The novelty of the study: The present study demonstrates how the protagonist feels entrapped and suffocated in her home, forced to live a life of false hope due to the impositions placed on her by her parents, her husband, her in-laws, and the patriarchal society which resultantly creates a feeling of alienation. The study concludes how dissuading a woman from her true self and forcing her to exist as an object results in a feeling of dissatisfaction, existential crisis, and alienation. The selected text has not been explored through the lens of Existential Feminism before.

Keywords: *Othering, Alienation, Alterity, Existential Feminism, Oppression, Existential Crisis, Identity Crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

Although marriage and motherhood are supposed to fill in the existential gap in a woman's sense of her *self*, due to certain socio-cultural, patriarchal structures and fixed personalized domestic roles of women in a marriage and the household, many women become victims of existential alienation and confused sense of identity (Foord & Gregson, 1986; Walby, 1989; Soulsby, & Bennett, 2017). The present study is an attempt to explore the text, *This House of Clay and Water*, by Faiqa Mansab in the light of Simone de Beauvoir's theory of women's *othering* and the resultant existential alienation. Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (2009) describes the concept of *othering* of women as:

One is not born but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (Beauvoir, p.330)

Beauvoir (2009) uses the terms *Subject* and *Other* to classify men as the absolutes and women as the subordinates in the ultimate binary of the gender. Women accept the false persona of happiness in exchange for the deprivations of freedom and fall into the abyss of alienation. Beauvoir considers marriage as a woman's only destiny for acceptance in her society and claims that a married woman is treated like a 'living doll', is rejected 'freedom', and not permits to know herself as a complete being. She mentions that monotonous housework daily repeated brings meaninglessness in her life and results in depression and alienation. This study highlights the patriarchal structures/practices in the society which isolate women as 'individuals' in marriage. More precisely, the purpose of the study is not only to highlight patriarchy in the text but also to focus on the role of the husband in the creation/destruction of the existential crisis in women in marriage. If a man treats a woman as the subordinate being who is supposed to follow fixed domestic roles assigned to her, a woman is bound to be isolated since it is the husband who is the most important contact to help her achieve her actualization.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Marriage as an institution is a gateway for both genders to find the fulfillment of *self*, however, due to patriarchal notions of male dominance and control and other socio-cultural practices/ roles make it difficult for women to achieve

actualization (Soman, 2009). Since women are generally identified with the role of domestic caretaker and child-bearers in our society, it becomes very difficult for women to pursue any other goals in life without genuine familial support (Lewis, 2001). The process of *othering* through patriarchy, mostly because of the role of a dominant husband, can alienate women in their homes leading to a severe existential crisis. Women's identities are formed with the association of the roles they execute in the society: a daughter, a mother, a sister, a wife (Ali, T. Krantz, G. Gul, R. Asad, N. Johansson, E. & Mogren, 2011; Singh, 2016). Moreover, in all their social roles, they are supposed to find fulfillment and happiness through housework, marriage, sexual passivity, and child nurturing since these are considered to be the 'natural' roles set for a woman by men (Hartmann, 1981). Starting from early childhood, girls are taught the ideals means of submission to patriarchy, where a good wife is supposed to be the one who is happy when her husband is happy, and boys are taught to control women in the family (Fikree & Pasha, 2004). However, for many women, such patriarchal ideals in marriage and domestic settings lead to dissatisfaction, identity loss, alienation, and ultimately existential crisis.

This House of Clay and Water (2017) by Faiqa Mansab deals with the *othering* of women and their struggle with patriarchy, identity, existential crisis, and alienation. The novel, narrated by many women, presents the conservative attitude of a society that is feudal, patriarchal, and oblivious towards its women and its intersex community. The notion of 'being modern' is used as a disguise by the people so that they can feel powerful and belong to the elite class. In reality, deep down such people are patriarchal and conservative and they practice their conservatism under the disguise of their modernity. Mansab weaves a tale of saints and sinners, hope and hopelessness, loss and gain, love and betrayal, courage and rebellion. It is the story of a woman who rebels because she feels "dirty living a lie".

Alienation and *Othering* in Existential Feminism

Existentialism is a "doctrine that makes human life possible and also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity" (Sartre, p. 18). The existential philosophy by Sartre convinces the existential beings to avail themselves the opportunity of the free choice given to human beings and define their existence subjectively as they have no preordained essence or nature and make our lives and existence meaningful and significant. Existential Feminism, inaugurated by Simone De Beauvoir, examines the meaningfulness of the existence of women; posing the general concern of what it means to be a woman as an individual (Mosier-Dubinsky, 2014). Although women are equally free to control their lives, certain socially constructed structures in society link 'woman' as only the 'other'; counterpart of 'man'. In this way, a 'woman' is merely a socio-cultural construct who is associated with an identity carved out for her by the roles assigned to her by society (Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Quinan, 2016). In other words, women are only seen as 'non-men' focusing on the dominant position/role of men in the society which undermines women's freedom to choose for themselves. This perception of women is oppressive and it ultimately leads to confused feminine identities and a fragmented sense of meaning in life (Grether, 1974; Moi, 1986). This *othering* causes existential alienation in women when they fail to create a balance between their perceived identities, affiliated with stereotyped gender roles, and their sense of fulfillment and happiness.

In Pakistani society, the gender position/roles of a 'husband' and a 'wife' are predetermined based on the patriarchal structures which make men assume the roles of women as housewives and child-bearers as natural in a marriage (Khalid, 2005; Jalal-ud-Din & Khan, 2008; Qamar, 2012). Women are generally believed to take care of the household chores and child nurturing after marriage and these are not deemed as important tasks where husbands can support their wives (Delphy, 1984; Waring, 1998). Marriage and childbearing can thus become institutions to alienate women, where the husband dominates the relationship as a typical patriarch (Hakeem & Aziz, 1998). Alongside many socio-cultural patriarchal practices/structures, men in the roles of 'husbands' play a crucial role in isolating women as mere passive 'objects' to the active 'subjects'. Stereotypical familial gender roles, therefore, erupt because of social institutions and fixed socially constructed roles for both genders in the family, where men are made to think that their natural responsibility is to protect and control women in the family (Alavi, 1991; Hussain, Naz, Khan, Daraz, & Khan, 2015). An important social marker for men to isolate women in marriage through patriarchal control is the understanding that women do not contribute to the economic empowerment of the family and men are solely responsible for breadwinning (Isran & Isran, 2012). Another important reason for the isolation of women in marriage is the stereotypical role assigned to women as housewives where they are considered only good enough for domestic labor (Saeed & Zainab, 2017). Unfortunately, religion also at times becomes a source to justify the male domination and control of women in marriage (Raday, 2003; Qadir & Riaz, 2015; Wood, 2019).

Türkkan (2010) suggests that "Other" and "alterity" are two interrelated concepts. As a condition of "otherness," alterity is defined as "the state of being other or different; diversity". The construction of the subject is inseparable from the construction of its other. The other is not something outside or beyond the self, as the traditional Cartesian perspective would have it; rather, it is deeply implicated in and with the self. Thus one is inclined to ask: "What is my relationship to 'the other'?" and "How should I act towards 'the other'?" The term "alterity" suggests that the other involved in these questions is neither an abstract proposition nor unrelated and therefore irrelevant to considerations of the self. According to Pinchevski (2018), self-understanding is not grounded in subjective self-awareness. "Identity is something all people have, or ought to have or are searching for...Identity is something people (and groups) can have without being aware of it. (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). A stable sense of 'self' or personal identity in domestic relationships is

important to prioritize social behavior (Askham, 1976). Ochs (1993) holds that social identities are influenced by the individual's interaction with other members of society and a failure to achieve a balanced relationship as per social norms may lead to an identity crisis. In Pakistan, girls from an early age are made to internalize patriarchy through various socio-cultural norms/practices which are re-socialized after marriage. This re-socialization includes influences of elder women alongside the husband in marriage to gain control over women's behavior and attitudes (Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016). It is primarily for this reason that the role/support of the husband is one of the most important factors for a woman to achieve a harmonious balance between 'self' and 'other' in a marriage just as a woman's support is for her husband (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012).

Alienation refers to the sense of disaffection and estrangement between people, their relationships, and their environment leading to meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement in life (Seeman, 1959). The term first got popularity in the nineteenth century from Hegel's school of thought. Hegelian concept of alienation is based on the concept of separation of the human spirit from the objective world around it, as a result, it feels alienated from the self. Leopold (2018, p.3) holds that "alienation obtains when a separation between a subject and object that properly belong together, frustrates or conflicts with that baseline connectedness or harmony". This existential alienation renders an individual powerless to control one's life, to identify with the social roles to such an extent that one's desires feel alien to one's self (Jaeggi 2014). Humans have an innate longing of getting their consciousness recognized by others without reciprocating the same. (Debnath, 2020). One reason for female alienation and confused identity in marriage is when women blame themselves for the unhappiness of their husbands and family since they are taught to be responsible for the said. Sarfaraz (1997) discusses the complexity of the concept of alienation. Even though the concept of alienation is vital in the understanding of human existence. The term alienation is often misrepresented and is often used in erroneous contexts but that doesn't deprive it of its importance. Understanding of alienation paves the path for the understanding of existential truth about *self*. Hence, comprehending alienation leads towards the understanding actual self. Downing and Roush (1985) believe that any model that endeavors to pronounce accurately events in women's lives must acknowledge the prejudice and discrimination that are a significant part of their life experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study is qualitative and it is epistemologically grounded in Feminist criticism. Tyson elucidates, "broadly defined, feminist criticism examines how literature (and other cultural production) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson, 1998, p. 83). The text *This House of Clay and Water* by Faiqa Mansab is critically analyzed keeping in mind the notions of alienation and *othering* of women by the patriarchal society using the theoretical framework of Existential Feminism. For the said purpose, a *close reading* of the narrative instances of *othering*, alienation, and existential crisis of the protagonist are analyzed using the theoretical tenants of Beauvoir's theory of "Women as Others" (2009). According to Beauvoir, societal norms convince women to limit themselves solely to the roles of the perpetual *other*. *Close reading* is meant to analyze a text layer by layer in a way that connects the form and structure to find deeper meanings of the text (Howe, 2009). A close reading of the selected text here essentially draws upon the persona of the protagonist (Kusch, 2016), 'Nida' to analyse her post-marital existential alienation and the resultant confused identity. A persona in literature is the 'voice' that the author chooses to address a particular concern/ideology (Nordquist, 2019). The analysis of the identity persona, which is "a medium to the message" (Gibson, 1969, p.2) in a text, can lead to the subtle underlying socio-cultural ideology addressed in it. Besides, the role of men as 'husbands' in a patriarchal marital setting is also studied to focus on the need for a unified approach for both men and women to be active agents to achieve fulfillment in marriage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Existential Alienation of the Female Self in *This House of Clay and Water*

Nida, the protagonist of the text is born in a wealthy house in Lahore. She is the only daughter in the family. Her marriage is arranged by her family to a rich and politically sound man named Saqib. Saqib is a traditional stereotypical male character who has been brought up in a patriarchal environment. Soon after her marriage, Nida is given the responsibilities of a housewife which she performs happily. She spends most of her days attending political events with Saqib and enjoys the life of a politician's wife. However, things start taking a turn with the birth of Fatima, who suffers from Down syndrome. Nida is blamed for the abnormality of her daughter who dies young. Later Nida is forced to go through another abortion because she is not considered fit for bearing another child. These events along with her husband's indifference alienate Nida in her house where she becomes emotionally detached from everyone. She stops attending the festivities of her husband's political life and spends most of her days at Data Darbar mourning the death of her daughter. At the Dargah, she meets a transgender, Bhanggi, and beautiful friendship blossoms between the two. Later they fall in love and Nida decides to leave behind everything and moves to live at the Dargah with Bhanggi. When Saqib finds out about Nida, she is forced to live with Saqib for a while. In the intervening time, Bhanggi is murdered. Once Nida can bury Bhanggi near her daughter Fatima she goes insane. She spends the rest of her living in the graveyard near her loved one.

Patriarchal Marriage and Isolation of Women: The institute of marriage is vital to the sustenance of any progressive society. However, the institute of marriage may be misused as a way of the assertion of patriarchal influence on women,

resultantly alienating, oppressing, and *othering* them (Toerien & Williams, 2003). Beauvoir (2009) expresses views about the suppression of women and their alienation in a patriarchal society. She talks about marriage being a woman's only destiny for acceptance in her society and claims that a married woman is treated like an 'object', is rejected 'freedom', and is not permitted to know herself as a complete being. A successful woman is projected to be indulged completely in domestic chores and familial obligations, while the need to pursue interests outside her domestic roles is not considered necessary for her happiness. Beauvoir mentions that monotonous housework is daily repeated. Hence, it brings meaninglessness to women's life and results in depression, dissatisfaction, and alienation (Beauvoir, 2009). We find that the protagonist of the text Nida is trapped in an unhappy marriage. Patriarchal society expects of her, like the perfect Pakistani woman, to devote herself solely to her husband, who is continuously performing the role of 'Subject', reassuring his authority again and again. Her feelings of being are suppressed as a result of performing the role of her husband's *other*. Her dissatisfaction and alienation with her husband is shown in the very beginning when at the instance, she utters the name of her husband and feels,

I imagine my tongue stained dark with it. (Mansab, 2017, p. 3)

Saqib, the husband, is a typical patriarchal man who tries to confine Nida in the role of a housewife and wants her to perform according to his wishes. Nida has spent her whole life pleasing others. First, she lives according to the wishes of her mother and later acts on the will of her husband. As a result of this constant depiction of *self* that she must attain, she feels alienated especially from her mother and husband. She always identifies herself in association with her husband (subject). Even though she's unhappy in her marriage, she can't escape from it because she doesn't know who she is without her husband in the patriarchal society. She describes the situation in the following words:

I was a word that existed because there was another word that was my opposite, and without it I was nothing. (Mansab, 2017, p. 22)

The dissatisfaction that Nida feels in her marriage is not entirely grounded on the treatment of Saqib and her mother-in-law but also on the way patriarchal society deals with the notion of a failed marriage since it is majorly the woman to be blamed for the failure of the marriage. This dissatisfaction is clearly shown in many instances. Such as:

If a woman was unhappy in her marriage, it was her fault. If her husband didn't think she was worth the effort, why would anyone else? If a woman couldn't even manage her husband, she was a dullard and a failure. Exhibit A: Me. (Mansab, 2017, p. 23)

Like many other women, Nida is also taught from early childhood, to be subordinate and obedient to her husband in marriage. It was also her duty to keep her husband happy and turn her marriage into a successful relationship. In other words, a wife's prime responsibility in marriage is to keep her husband satisfied.

Socio-cultural Patriarchal Norms/ Practices: As Beauvoir argues that women's exploitation is historical and social, and therefore amenable to change (Beauvoir, 2009). Nida is born in a wealthy family and later marries the family of politicians but this doesn't save her from socio-cultural stereotypes. Nida experiences rejection from her very childhood. She never feels a good enough daughter or sister. Her mother never loves her, acknowledges her, or cares for her in her lifetime. She always tries to live up to the expected ideal of a perfect woman who can keep everyone around her happy. There are things that every woman should be and she never is one. A very early memory of her childhood reflects the trauma that she faces due to the patriarchal norms of society. Nida recalls:

My brother would complain of my inadequacy as a hostess and as a style icon-things, every woman in Lahore should naturally be. Somehow I never was one, according to them. I wasn't thin, sophisticated, or loquacious enough. (Mansab, 2017, p. 35)

This constant *othering* makes her want a man as her lover who will accept her as who she is. She gets married to a wealthy and ambitious politician. Like any other newly married woman, Nida also links her happiness with the happiness of her husband and mother in law. Her sole purpose of existence is to make her husband happy. However, she soon realizes that no matter what she does, she fails to do that ultimately. Saqib expects her to be submissive and docile, as is his idea of an ideal wife. He demarcates her boundaries and roles. He expects Nida to unquestioningly play that role of a housewife while he is free to indulge in his associations and adventures. Their marriage is a one-way road that always leads to Saqib, never to Nida. Nida describes the bad habits and indulgences of her husband throughout the text but because of his *masculinity*, he never feels accountable for anything.

Another important socio-cultural practice highlighted through the *othering* of the protagonist is the misuse of religion by men to gain power over their wives. Women are often identified with the moral beings whose religious duty is to keep their husbands happy and satisfied. Even though Saqib himself is not a devout follower of religion, he uses it as a tool to oppress his wife, forming her into a perpetual *other*.

A selfless woman is most exalted. Ungrateful wives will fill the maw of hell. (Mansab, 2017, p. 39)

Saqib, like many other men who are trained in a patriarchal society, believes that women are not good enough to make rational decisions and are not competent enough to handle issues of relevant importance. For him, women are not competent enough to handle such power and position. Upon returning to Nida from political campaigns he will not only make her feel belittled by telling her about the harshness of the outside world but also criticizes the women in politics as faulty in character and conduct. He says that,

It's terrible to hear the tales. You wouldn't last a day there. (Mansab, 2017, p. 83)

The constant *othering* and belittling by her husband mark the sole existence of Nida as the antithesis of Saqib. Even in her existential crisis, she, one way or another, links her peace with her unhappy married life. These lines accentuate a strong sense of alienation she feels while living in her house.

*I wasn't sure what piety was. Was it 'obedience' to a husband whom one knew to be wrong?
Or was it some unknown, undefined quality within the hidden Self? To annihilate the Self,
mustn't one first determine the Self? I didn't have a self to speak of. (Mansab, 2017, p. 22)*

Such social standards create existential alienation in women as in the case depicted in the above lines. Due to patriarchal suppression, she loses the sense of her *self* and isolates herself from the rest of the world. She also fails to identify herself as an individual unique in herself, responsible for her happiness.

Child-Bearing and Motherhood: Women are generally considered responsible for the issues of fertility, childbearing, and childlessness. While men face little pressure in the situation, women face stigmatization and blunt criticism in issues of childbearing /rearing (Mumtaz, Shahid, & Levay, 2013). Nida loses her infant child Fatima to Down's syndrome. Her insensitive husband and mother-in-law blames her for being 'diseased' and giving birth to a 'monstrosity'. Later she is forced to abort her baby by her mother-in-law. According to her mother-in-law, the second child will be a monster just like Fatima. Though emotionally shattered due to the death of her daughter, she seeks no compassion from her family that considers her an unserviceable *object* at home, denigrates her.

*I was labeled unfit to give birth and was ordered never to try 'that' again. I was the monster
who had nurtured another monster inside herself in secret, and then inflicted it on them.
(Mansab, 2017, p.115)*

Saqib and his mother act as a direct medium of oppression in Nida's life. After the birth of an autistic child they further belittle Nida to the role of a *monster bearing woman*, an opposite *other* of Saqib, who is not only inferior but now a monstrosity in herself. Her mother-in-law says:

*Don't think of having another child. God has punished you. Why should my son suffer with
you? As soon as possible, Saqib must find a new wife. (Mansab, 2017, p.115)*

As Beauvoir (2009) explains that the representation of the world is just like the world itself, the creation of men; men have described the world from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth. For Nida, the absolute truth is that her dead child is a monster and she is not allowed to mourn for her. As she says,

*No one remembered those who were missing. No one remembered or mentioned my little
Fatima. Not even me. (Mansab, 2017, p. 41)*

For Beauvoir, women choose happiness or accept it in exchange for the deprivations of freedom. Nida does the same, hence suffers from the consequences. When she is unable to perfectly perform the role she is supposed to be performing, she is cast-off. She feels alienated and falls into the abyss of existential crisis. Beauvoir (2009) states that upon surrendering to this *othering* and accepting the label of the *object*, women-only reinforce the same idea. Nida, though alienated in herself, is constantly reassuring the dominance of her husband to him. In her mind, it is a way of keeping him happy,

I had to reaffirm his beliefs that he was the superior being in my life. (Mansab, 2017, p. 115).

Alienation and the Stranded Self: Beauvoir writes about how the oppression of a woman makes them feel empty, dissatisfied and alienated. The constant process of oppression and *othering* makes women feel miniaturized and useless. For Beauvoir, once women completely let go of the false persona of happiness then she suffers from alienation, resulting in fights a war with her sense of being. She also emphasizes how women desire something more than their husbands, children, and homes. To break free from this *othering*, women need to disestablish the myth of being a perfect woman. What a woman is supposed to be and what she is.

Nida, after losing her child starts to question her being. Who she is? Was she a daughter? A mother? A wife? A woman? Or just a human being with mortal feelings. At an instance, while talking with Bhanggi she says:

*To find self-expression, must a woman choose the role of wife, mistress, or even a mother,
daughter, and sister? Why couldn't a woman just be, regardless of body and role? (Mansab,
2017, p. 171)*

Nida's existential crisis grows stronger and stronger as the text progresses. She feels alienated from her rich husband, in her luxurious life. The constant dehumanizing makes her hate her relations and even herself. She desires to leave her house, never to return. She often thinks about destroying herself but ends up doing nothing because to destroy the *self*, one must first determine the *self* and Nida feels that she does not have a *self*. She is the *other* to Saqib who only exists to please his being.

Nida, towards the end, realizes that the stain of fearfulness and duplicity is big and ugly on her forehead. Years of her life turn out to be lies nothing more than smoke and lies. Saqib forces her to exist under his supremacy, as his subordinate but he never owns the power to make her feel happy about it. He could not make her accept his truth as her reality. As Beauvoir (2009) suggests such behaviors are only accepted by women themselves and to do so they have to kill their actual self, as a result, they feel alienated. At an instance, while contemplating her past life, Nida questions her *self*, and the very purpose of her existence:

I'd morphed, altered, nipped, and tucked away bits of my personality for so long, and I no longer recognized myself. I feared that one day, even if I wanted to, I wouldn't be able to identify myself. I'd be forever trapped in an image of another's making, and there would be no escape because I would have forgotten to want to escape. (Mansab, 2017, p. 82)

According to Beauvoir (2009) in the perplexing and chaotic understanding of what or who a woman is, a woman's self-consciousness constructs through the process of elimination basing it on her relationship with a man. When a woman tries to understand herself, separately from the male subject, she feels alienated and undergoes existential crisis because she deconstructs her *othered Self* and ends up with the realization of having no identity at all. As Nida says,

No one knew me, no one recognized me-not even me, and so I don't blame them in the least. (Mansab, 2017, p. 117)

We note how the protagonist, Nida, being trapped in her domestic settings, unable to live, unable to mourn the death of her children, being forced to play the role of a happy housewife, feels emptiness, dissatisfaction, and alienation. We find that Nida's feelings of dissatisfaction, and alienation grow even stronger when she loses her daughter and is forced to undergo an abortion. The words used by the protagonist while describing herself, convey how stifled, suffocated, and alienated she had been at her dwelling. Her words prove how her life as *other*, suffocates her and makes her feel empty and dissatisfied.

I was frantically fanning the spark of identity that I hope remained in the ambers of my ashes. (Mansab, 2017, p. 24)

Nida endures alienation because she feels she is trapped forever and will know nothing but misery for her entire existence. It highlights how miserable life becomes when a person is not allowed to choose a way of living but to live according to the choices and decisions of others. Women often fall into existential crisis because they feel alienated in their own homes. This alienation and existential crisis often stem from the constant *othering* of patriarchal and stereotypical norms of the society. It mirrors the misery and alienation Nida feels while living according to her husband's appreciation. Moreover, Nida keeps on reinforcing her misery and un-fulfillment throughout the text. She excruciatingly describes her melancholy and alienation as:

A part of me was completely struggling against the knowledge that my life was a spectacle, bare and venerable, like a book without a spine and cover, its pages loose and exposed. (Mansab, 2017, p. 19)

Throughout the text, Nida establishes her isolation in her maternal home as well as her husband's house. Likewise, she also pronounces her intimate isolation as,

What was more tragic, the lives people lived, or the deaths they died? (Mansab, 2017, p. 221).

Beauvoir (2009) alludes that a woman is not expected by the established norms to have an independent being/self. A woman loses her identity and sense of being when she is confined within her home just like a subordinate to the male subject. Resultantly women feel alienation from their selves and their loved ones which leads them to suffer from a crisis of existence. Further, she mentions this crisis is inevitable if a woman is to realize the importance of her being, as a result summoning up the courage of detaching from this forced identity. At times, Nida feels like an alien in her house, restricted and bound, deprived of her freedom, unable to choose her way of life. She refers to how at her house, she loses her understanding of *self* and becomes a woman her husband wants her to be. She confronts her husband as:

It's a contradiction in terms. Given. Freedom. Freedom isn't given. It just is. If it had to be given, it's not freedom. (Mansab, 2017, p. 203).

These lines highlight Nida's lack of freedom and free will. She is being forced to live a life, not of her choosing, rather she is never given the liberty to choose from herself. Neither her parental home nor her husband's house allows her to be

who she wants to be. She always senses alienation and isolation to the closest people in her life. As a result, she becomes a victim of alienation and existential crisis and feels merely a lifeless puppet in the hands of her husband.

The Resurrection of Selfhood: After bidding farewell to her mother and daughter, Nida feels a strong sense of loss regarding her identity and *self*. Though her mother always acts as a medium of patriarchal supremacy and her daughter's illness is a tool of constant belittling, Nida still loves them. They are the ones who keep her connected with the world. After their death, her feeling of alienation grows stronger and stronger. She often finds herself yearning for an understanding of self and her existence. She never feels peace, and acceptance in her house. At her house she always lives under the fear of making her husband unhappy, the subject to her *altered self*, always comes in her way. For Nida, peace is only at Dargah, where she can go and sit for hours and hours, mourning the loss of her daughter and collecting the scattered pieces of her existence.

We came here because we had exhausted all other avenues of hope. At dargahs, there was no gender, no privileging—all who came here were seekers, on a quest for the Self. (Mansab, 2017, p. 49).

We can establish that the Dargah becomes a source of salvation of Nida. Dargah is the only place where she does not feel alienated and achieves a sense of belongingness since it is a place of “no gender”; no *othering*. There she is not the wife of a politician but a woman in search for peace and her true *self*. Hence she can break free from the myth of a woman at Dargah because only at this place she is not performing the role of *other*, she is no one but Nida. In other words, only when she stops identifying herself with the persona of the perfect wife does she find her inner voice. As she says herself,

My other self, however, I had found wandering the streets and shrines of Lahore. (Mansab, 2017, p. 170).

Beauvoir (2009) suggests once women come out of the fake persona of happiness, they realize their existential crisis. According to her, no one can help women to come out of this crisis and destroy their altered self but themselves. For the reason that this *otherness* is very deeply rooted in society and there is no other way of eradicating it. We interpret that for Nida it can only happen through an act of rebellion. This act of rebellion is the love for Bhanggi; a transgender. Nida feels like a different person when she is with Bhanggi, she is no longer a wife or daughter-in-law, she is just herself.

I could be myself with this hermaphrodite. (Mansab, 2017, p. 144).

It is important to note here that Nida's love for a transgender is symbolic of her breaking away from the stereotypical roles/ positions of two genders, that is, men and women in society. She discovers her real *self* through a ‘non-gendered’ being who brings her out of the conflict of being a ‘subjugated wife’ and a ‘mother in pain’. Upon contemplating this sense of change she comes to terms with her original sense of being, rather she discovers her true self that was burned down but now it rises from ashes just like a phoenix. This transformation shows at an instance when Nida questions herself:

Did a woman's identity change because of whom she loved? (Mansab, 2017, p. 208)

Once Nida comes to an understanding of herself and her being, she can make decide for herself. To come out of this alienation, Nida needs to feel a sense of belonging where she's away from patriarchal stereotypes associated with being a ‘perfect’ woman. It's something that she is never allowed to do, but now she decides to write her fate with her own hands. We scrutinize that the moment Nida decides to leave her home behind, she completely breaks free from the constrains of her former self, and as a result of this rebellious act, she gets over her alienation and existential crisis.

I was able to come to terms with who I had become after that one act of free will. (Mansab, 2017, p. 220)

Nida breaks the myth of being a perfect woman and indicates her being in separation from her husband. Though Nida is a very religious woman and always tries to follow the path of God somehow this act of rebellion doesn't make her feel bad about herself rather she feels liberated.

The veil has lifted now, I was free. I had come to the shrine. My home. (Mansab, 2017, p. 246)

Finally, her love for transgender and in her insanity we find that she finally comes to a sense of fulfilled *self*. This is her space that is genderless as well as reasonless, where she does not have to identify with her roles of an ideal wife or a diseased mother who could not bear children.

CONCLUSION

The text *This House of Clay and Water* validates that when a woman is only limited to the notion of *other* in her role as a daughter, wife, and mother, her identity, and *self* are only associated with the roles she plays in the lives of patriarchal authorities e.g. her husband. Women like Nida, trapped in a domestic setting build a false persona of happiness to cope up with the patriarchal society. When the persona of this perfect life is crashed it creates a sense of alienation in her. The

text depicts how Nida is affected by the entrapment she faces at home first by her mother later by her husband and the loss of her daughter and forced abortion. This results in the feeling of alienation and a quest for identity and self. We establish that the alienation faced by the protagonist due to the abandonment of her true self and living the role of an 'other', is the actual reason for her existential alienation. Moreover, it is the identity crisis faced by Nida and the resulting sense of alienation that forces her to abandon her domestic role, to move far away from her house, with her loved one Bhanggi; a transgender at Data Darbar. Furthermore, it highlights how the partner of her own choice helps her in overcoming the sense of alienation which results in the revival of a feeling of satisfaction and happiness in her. This research, in the light of Simone de Beauvoir's theory, concludes that for women to regain their true self and get rid of alienation, the myth of the *ideal woman* must be dismantled. Moreover, the role of the husband is crucial to dismantling this false persona which makes a wife victim to patriarchal socio-cultural norms/practices. If the husband would have treated her differently she would not have ended up insane.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The study was delimited to the analysis of one novel, *This House of Clay and Water* by Faiqa Mansab with the existentialist feminist perspective. For future research, it is recommended that the text may be explored from the perspective of transgender studies as well as cultural studies. The study may be implicated in the socio-cultural understanding and significance of women's position /roles in society.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study can also pave way for the understanding of women's power roles in place of authority and stability provided by a patriarchal society. The study may also prove helpful in deconstructing stereotypes that associate women's happiness with money, economic stability, marriage, and child-bearing alone.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

The paper was conceived during a discussion between both authors.

Dr. Amna Saeed: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Editing, and drafting.

Aiman Rehman: Theoretical Grounding, Analysis.

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