



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Subverting Gendered Identities in Faiqa Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water*: A Post-Feminist Study

<sup>1</sup>Javed Iqbal \*, <sup>2</sup>Zainab Ayaz and <sup>3</sup>Hafiz Adnan Riffat

1. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. BS (Hons), Department of English, University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

\*Corresponding Author

70127869@student.uol.edu.pk

## ABSTRACT

The present study is aimed to explicate the space for gender with assumption that how gendered identities are subverted. This research has analyzed Faiqa Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* by drawing on Nicola Rivers' *Postfeminism(s) and The Arrival of Fourth Wave: Turning Tides*. The data was selected in the form of extracts from the different parts of the novel and were analyzed accordingly. It concerns neither with feministic nor misogynistic perspective but to repatriate a balance in genders, deteriorated by the subversion of identities. The significance of the study lies in the fact of urgency to redefine the gendered boundaries in the present societies. The chief objective of the present attempt was to assess the imbalance of space and subversion of identities for all genders. It also considers the pseudo feminists' portrayal of women as vulnerable subject under observation. The basic concern of the present attempt was to evaluate the imbalance of space and subversion of identities in the present era. The results and discussions have rendered the mitigation of imbalance in genders articulated in Faiqa Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water*.

## KEYWORDS

Gender, Space, subversion of identities, Nicola Rivers, *This House of Clay and Water*

## Introduction

In the realm of patriarchy and matriarchy in the twenty-first century, space and gender have taken center stage. It talks about how different genders manipulate space in relation to their performative actions in the physical world. Furthermore, it states that gender identity is ill-defined and sporadically expressed. Gendered identities are asserted through the frequent occurrence of gender performances. The space where relationships within a society are publicly articulated at a particular time and place becomes the site of cultural carvings. According to Rivers (2017), contemporary gender studies are gathering around the central issues of time and space. Many of today's writers have addressed the problems facing modern society.

There is not much research on the topic of space and gender in academia, despite the fact that the idea is not new. In terms of the relationship between the movement and gender, the gendered boundaries of society, and the ways in which it governs the lives of genders, the intersections of gender and space have historically increasingly entered the critical domain of feminism. It offers fresh approaches to addressing gender-based space problems in practical settings. Postfeminist writings assert that all genders are accountable for establishing this space, which in turn impacts each gender's life cycle.

The main focus of this study is how gender and space are conceptualized in Mansab's (2017) *This House of Clay and Water*. Her debut novel, which was released in May 2017 by Penguin Random House India, is this work of literature. It declares a gender-neutral search for space. Feminists in the past supported the idea that women needed a strong identity because they saw it as essential to their ability to function in society. Nerve (2017) discusses this novel as follows: Feminist identity politics would not be feasible without a central conception of women. As noted by Butler (1990, 2004), there are many postmodern and poststructuralist reasons to be more concerned with the concept of well-defined, non-social conceptual boundaries than with the idea of concrete identities per se. Instead of weighing this deconstruction equally with an examination of feminist political doctrines and organizational strategies, she focuses only on issues related to the construction of feminine identity.

The fragility of women's existence has been overemphasized by feminists, who also portray men as uncivilized and barbaric. The contemporary predicament of the genders is caused by issues related to transgenderism, patriarchy, and matriarchy. Their roles and responsibilities in society are unbalanced, and this has an impact on them in one way or another. The goal of this study is to bring the issue of gender imbalances and gendered identities—which was raised by feminists of the twenty-first century—back to the real world and examine how feminist ideas have affected the existence of the other two genders. *This House of Clay and Water* has undergone a critical analysis for this reason.

### **Literature Review**

The pertinent literature that was examined throughout the investigation is included in this chapter. The study's primary goal was to identify the gendered identities and their subversion that feminist ideology has brought about in modern society. Examining how space affects how people of all genders live their lives was the research's second main goal. The first section of the chapter reviews research that directly examines the lives of men, women, and transgender people in terms of societal spaces where they are marginalized, persecuted, and oppressed. Furthermore, it clarifies how gender contributes to the creation of the space. The chapter's middle section is relevant to the topic of feminism's obsolescence in modern society. Where the purpose of feminism is elucidated. It is discussed that feminism's goal has been met and that, in the twenty-first century, it is no longer necessary. The time has come to adopt postfeminism, a new ideology that emphasizes the equality of all three genders in their respective fields. The research gap that was discovered both before and during the study's conduct is the main topic of discussion at the end of the chapter. In order to provide readers with a thorough background, pertinent works in the field have been looked up; the gendered boundaries and their effects, the obsolescence of feminism, and the start of the postfeminism era in contemporary society have all been covered in detail.

### **Approaches of Space and Feminist Ideology**

The goal of this study was to determine how gendered spaces contribute to the imbalance of gender identities in modern society. The intersection of gender, sexual orientation, and occupation is highlighted by Simpson (2014) in order to examine how the male cabin crew uses space to manage their gender identities. Because management essentially controls how the service is provided, cabin crew work can be characterized as "paraprofessional" service (p. 292).

## The Obsolescence of Feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

According to Taskeen and Mohsin (2018) and Iqbal (2024), language gives people's lives a sense of normalcy. Everybody tries to take refuge in the words that characterize and define who they are. In sharp contrast to this idea, there are those among us who have been brutally marginalized by society because of their sexual orientation. One such group is the transgender population, also known as the "Kinnar" or "Hijra" community in South Asian countries. Pakistan and other nearby countries are home to modern writers who are deftly navigating the third gender issue. Roy's (2017) latest book, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* delves into the taboo realm of a transgender person's existence. *This House of Clay and Water*, written in 2017 by Pakistani author Faiqa Mansab, addresses the atrocities meted out to the transgender protagonist by the fallen social structure in Lahore. The purpose of this study is to assess Roy and Mansab's critical response to the predicament of the transgender community in Pakistan and India. It also looks at how important language is to these underprivileged groups. This study examines the historical shifts that have occurred recently regarding women's opportunities as well as the incidents that have occurred that continue to result in discrimination and inequality against women. The study's findings raised questions about the definition of feminism but also backed the objectives of feminism. Some women fit the definition of a feminist; of these, half were either "fence sitters" or incapable of expressing a clear position.

## The Imbalance in all Genders and Their Marginalization

The ways in which Facebook, a private company, enabled particular, nationally tinged grieving processes bring to light a major criticism of Feminist's theory of precocity put forth by Dean (2008). The distinction between sovereign powers is overly simplistic. In post-9/11 writings are consistently alarming in their depiction of the unwieldy state of sovereignty that has resulted from the suspension of the law during the *War on Terror*. Its analysis of the convergence of government mentality and sovereignty within the confines of Guantanamo Bay, where many detainees are held indefinitely, illustrates most powerfully how American government forces can be interpreted as a sovereign power not subject to international law. Her further argues, however, that the emphasis on the law results in a constrained understanding of how sovereignty functions within communicative, globalized capitalis. The limited legal viewpoint fails to acknowledge the influence of corporate, financial, and economic non-governmental interests on political policy.

Butler's presence in Europe during the attacks on Paris offers a chance to consider the details of her philosophical and rich legacy. As seen in her post-9/11 text *Prearious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Butler's most recent work can be described as a shift towards more explicit global and bio political concerns (Butler, 2004).

## Material and Methods

The study is qualitative in nature as the data of the study comprises Mansab's (2017) *This House Of Clay And Water*. Rivers (2017) concept of feminism has been used as a theoretical framework to direct this investigation. She discusses the contemporary feminism movement's resurgence, particularly in popular culture and the media, which has some heralding the arrival of the fourth wave. Scholarly investigations examine the position of fourth wave feminism vis-à-vis its predecessors, with a specific focus on the ways in which it interacts with varying interpretations of postfeminism. The relationship between various conceptions of postfeminism(s) is illustrated through approachable and highly relevant examples, such as the contentious actions of the activist group Femen, the growing phenomenon of "celebrity feminism," or the presumptive antiquated views of

feminists associated with earlier waves. Her work encourages readers interested in the relationship between feminism and popular culture to engage with past debates and theorists, as it presses the need for an intergenerational approach to fourth-wave feminism. This allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of feminist theory and gives them a chance to reflect before jumping headfirst into another wave. She starts the conversation about how gender and sex are related in society. She also reveals the parallels as well as the rigid binary differences between gender and sex. The primary argument is that gender identity and sex are intricately related.

Rivers (2017) argues that gender is predominantly a cultural agent and constitutes the concepts of femininity or masculinity and homosexual or heterosexual identities. Her views have an amiable resemblance in the present issue of gender inequality in the contemporary society. The main rationale behind selecting the views of Rivers was gender inequality and the treatment of all genders on the basis of society defined patterns and gendered boundaries in the society. The particular focus of the study has also been guided and remained straight by considering the approach of the theorist regarding empowerment of all genders not in terms of men, women and transgender but as human identities which are free from the shackles and restraints of our society. As a term, postfeminism means coming after feminism which implies that the motives and objectives of feminism are no longer needed. *Post-feminism* describes a perception that the objectives of feminism have already been achieved, according to feminists, so making further efforts in this domain is redundant. *Post-feminism* negatively describes that the feminists are reckoned to be sexist and oppressive.

Therefore, it can be rightly asserted that recent literature highlights the significance of postfeminism instead of feminism. The obsolescence of feminism has been widely established as it only encompasses the rights of one gender only. The overgrowth of female has put them on the way to marginalize the other one. The basic where impotence, from where the feminism sprouted was based on the necessity of equal rights of women. However, with the course of time women are in a want to get supremacy over men. Postfeminism is the talk of the town as well as the need of the hour.

## Results and Discussion

The novel *This House Of Clay And Water* has been written by Faiqa Mansab. She is one of those few Pakistani writers who have written on the delicate and critical issues of the contemporary society. The novel *This House of Clay and Water* is a story of forbidden love. There is an incarnation of this feeling which is fabricated with tragedy and it is one of the main themes of the novel. Mansab discloses in an interview that she wrote the novel that comprised three main themes which are common women's struggles and self-deception, in order to get prestige. It is proclaimed through the protagonist Nida who demonstrates a denial to the moral corruption of the world in her surroundings. There are many forced roles of gender that are lying at the center of the present novel. It is written that the body of women is shown as the personal property of men that can be demanded, possessed and rejected. According to her, when she wrote that novel, she wanted to hit the deepest part of the readers' minds.

*Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides* (2017) is a book by the gender philosopher Nicola Rivers, in which she argues that gender is a kind of improvised performance. The very first part of the book starts with the assertion that females are not the proper subject of feminism as they are defined strictly according to the structures of society. Rather, feminists do not have a concrete subject to discuss. The writer is concerned with two distinctions between gender and sex and other gender based

distinctions. She highlights that there is complexity in the identities which are based on gender with respect to sex and the feminist have to go further from the conventional trends of 'metaphysics of substance'. The second part of the book investigates the origins and nature of gender. She has discussed the point of view of structuralism that how the concept of gender and its concreteness can be uncovered by Masquerade. The last one is the longest part of the book that focuses mainly on a work of Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault's publications and her own sympathetic critique of Monique Wittig. In the last chapter, she asserts that feminist ideology can survive without feminine identity and in this way, it will make it easy and solidarity.

### **The Concept of Space in This House of Clay and Water**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the most tumultuous one regarding the space created by all genders in the society. The concept of space has been created by a number of factors which are the ultimate result of ongoing ideologies of the contemporary world. Although the impact of space has devastated the individualistic nature of the genders, yet there is a role of genders in creating this space. As a matter of fact, there is interchangeability between the space and genders in having the impact on each other. According to postfeminist's thoughts, the overgrowth of one gender has undermined the capabilities and capacities of the other genders. In this context, the overgrowth of feminism has presented the men as cruel, barbaric and inhuman etc. which led to the confiscations of the rights of males. It is a dilemma of the present world that it has forgotten the third gender also in the fight of men and women. All the theories like structuralism, post structuralism etc. are talking about the identities and positions of only two genders but negating and neglecting the third one. The third gender that is transgender is the most neglected one regarding its identity, rights, status, position etc. *This House of Clay and Water* is an appropriate manifestation of this space among genders which has been created by the genders in the contemporary society. The basic notion of the writer is to elaborate the concept of space and its consequences on the lives of genders. All the characters of the novel are suffering in one way or the other from this space. The character of Nida, the protagonist of the novel, is unable to find any meanings in her existence. She considers herself a misfit in her family as there is no one to console and save her from the hysteria inside her. In her surroundings, there is an unseen but painful space which have ruined her life and made it unimportant and meaningless. There is nothingness and absurdity in all the things she comes in contact with. According to Judith Butler, this space is the result of lack of communications among the genders which has restrained them from intermingling with each other and has created an invisible strangeness in all genders. There is strangeness in the life of Nida. She expects the people in her surroundings to understand her but she gets disappointment every time. The people including her husband and other in-laws are unable to comprehend her and give her due respects.

*I'd morphed, altered, nipped and tucked away bits of my personality for so long, 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. (p. 82)*

### **The proclamation of the gendered identity in *This House of Clay and Water***

Since the last few decades, it has been viewed those genders have lost identities to each other. There is an outrageous engulfing of one gender's identity by the others. According to postfeminism, the roles of genders are reversed in the contemporary society which has led to the identity crises. All the genders are competing with one and others in order to get them recognized. Females are striving for emancipations from the clutches of patriarchy while males are also getting affected by the patriarchy in many ways.

Although there is not any male character in the novel *This House of Clay and Water*, yet it is clear from the character of Sasha that her husband was neglected by her. "We hope to drown the murmurs of our paralyzed conscience by screaming about other people's sins" (p. 20). The impetus behind this kind of writing seems to get the genders out of their present states regarding their identities.

*When death becomes an escape, when it becomes attractive, the purpose of life is fulfilled. To teach one it's futility, it's worthlessness, that is the purpose of life. Incongruously, its value lies in having imparted that lesson. (p. 190)*

### **The Discrepancies in Genders highlighted in the novel *This House of Clay and Water***

There are many societal roles which are imposed on the individuals on the basis of their genders irrespective of their interests and life goals. All the societies are prone towards assigning these roles at first place of individual's lives which create unseen and invisible consequences. Rivers has asserted in gender troubles that our identities are described by the roles we are assigned with in a society.

"We are all like that abandoned stranger, who adopt each other, use each other and stand by each other for as long as we can." (p. 39), here, Faiqa has proclaimed that she is always in search of finding refuge and solace and the Dargah is the only place where she finds them. On the other hand, there is a discrepancy in the life of Sasha and her husband. She remains in search of love and attention outside the house and neglects her husband and child intentionally or unintentionally. Thorough the character of Sasha, the writer has inferred the idea of male persecution in the hands of females. The husband of Sasha tries to seek the attention of her wife but remains devoid of.

*In the nights though, I couldn't help but weave the golden cloth of my dreams. Each stitch from heart to thought, and thought to heart, was painful to bear, even if it was joyous at times. Because each thread was fraught with the fears of being broken midway, lost and never found again. (p. 197)*

### **The Gendered Boundaries of Patriarchy, Matriarchy and Transgenderism in *This House of Clay and Water***

The gendered boundaries of patriarchy, matriarchy and transgenderism have been marked by different ideologies which are prevailing in the society for last few decades. In pursuit of the rights of one group, the other two groups are always marginalized and persecuted. The worst dents that have been done to the rights of all these genders are by feminism. Feminism is ostensibly focusing on the rights and emancipation of women. Throughout the history of feminism, it has always exaggerated the plight of women irrespective of their obligations and duties. All the waves of feminism have been devoted to the rights of women and they presented them as victims and subjugated. In this process, the rights of other two genders were undermined and were not considered appropriated to be discussed. It has been seen that the recent literature has been devoted to create and establish a balance among all genders regarding their rights and positions in the contemporary society. *This House of Clay and Water* is an embodiment of the fact that all the genders are worthy to be equaled in their rights and respects in the society. They all have self-esteem and self-respect which are unfortunately deteriorated by the feminist ideology. Faiqa Mansab has tried to channelize those issues which are considered taboo to talk about. Each character of the novel is showing the suffering of life. They are affected by the circumstances and the other people who came into their contact.

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### **The Subversion of Identities in *This House of Clay and Water***

Modern era is the age of subversion of identities in every field of life. People are striving to clip the wings of others by subverting their life activities. As far as the recent literature is concerned, it has been written to find out the factors lying behind these subversions of identities and how these are affecting the future lives of individuals. The present novel *This House of Clay and Water* has been written in order to show that this subversion of identities is leading toward a chaos and worst situation of genders in the contemporary society. Many of the incidents have been plotted to show that individuals are suffering from the societal impacts on their lives and they are molding their way of living according to the set patterns of society. The novel has presented the themes of love, betrayal and freedom in the transforming world of today's Pakistan. The writer has put the idea of forbidden love into practice by characterizing the most tumultuous lives of three individuals. The ever changing attitude of the society affects the individuality and innerness of one's life. According to the injunctions of postfeminism, there is need of a balance which should be maintained among all genders. One gender should not be allowed to alter the life circle of others. It means that the set standards of society are impossible to break and that is the main reason behind languishing of the all genders. "It was hard to break habits, so carefully constructed, so jealously guarded. What would I break them for" (p. 37).

Rivers emphasized in her theory that people should not be treated on the basis of their genders rather they should be dealt as human beings. For instance, there should not be any kind of distinction while talking to a woman and they should not be marginalized on the basis of their existence. Judith also says that it is the dilemma of the feminist movement that when it talks about women right, then it first negates the basic natural existence of women. After the course of ostensible demand for their rights, women themselves became victims in the hands of their own gender.

These lines were uttered by Nida which are showing the haplessness of women in our present society. But one thing is important to note that she herself seems responsible for the loneliness and sufferings of hysteria inside her. "This woman is an enigma. She is like the dream you follow within a dream. She makes no sense" (p. 31). Sasha is feminist and she also chooses a life of freedom but it is obvious that she let herself in the clutches of men to manipulate her. This aspect of the society shows the existentialist point of view of the individuals. It is the exaggeration and overgrowth of the feminist ideologies that led to the destruction of women life in the society. Sasha is frequenting the Dargah of Data Sahib when she gets fed up with the monotonous and sad life. Although women are subjugated and pressed in male oriented societies, yet these over simplifications of their rights always lead them towards their own manipulation. "Nobody thinks of protecting others from themselves. It's the people who claim concern and love who damage us the most" (p. 95).

### **Representation of Contemporary Society and the Subversion of Gendered Identities in *This House of Clay and Water***

Literature is the reflection of society. It represents the vices and virtues of any society and one can see the intricacies of that society through the lenses of literature. It has been observed that the literature is an ideal world for the idealists. If we want to know the life of Mughal Darbar then the Ghalib's poetry could serve as the picture of that era and if someone is interested in the rustic life of seventeenth century England, then the works of

Wordsworth are the best to be taken. The present novel *This House of Clay and Water* is the true representation of our Pakistan society in the twentieth and twenty first century. The writer Faiqa Mansab has elaborated the ongoing trends and ideologies of the society and the impact of those beliefs and stereotypes on the lives of individuals. There is a misconception among the readers' community that literature talks about the taboos of the society which is a remarkable thing but according to the literary people, it is the duty of the literature to provide insight into the neglected but delicate aspects of the society. It is said that the observation of a poet or writer is six times sharper than any common person. That is the reason that Faiqa Mansab has talked about the taboos of Pakistani society. It is a taboo to talk about a eunuch's love story or escape of a women from the shackles and restraints of the society and the life of any individuals beyond the set patterns and structures of the societal norms.

"Nobody thinks of protecting others from themselves. It's the people who claim concern and love who damage us the most" (p. 95). These lines of the novel show that the sufferings of the individuals are caused by the other people around them as nobody is there to understand the inner wars and conflicts which are going inside them. The characters of the novel are unable to express their pains and sorrows to near and dears as they all were the reasons behind their pains. For instance, Nida, the protagonist is suffering because of her husband, so how it possible is that she could complain about her husband to the family of the latter.

### Conclusion

The novel's textual analysis demonstrated how modern society has established gendered borders between patriarchy, matriarchy, and transgenderism. The marginalization and persecution of genders in the twenty-first century is embodied by the modern Anglophone Pakistani. The most sensitive yet unaddressed problems in our society are depicted in the novel *This House of Clay Water*. It has been believed that because of the individuals in their immediate environment, people of all genders experience a variety of problems. They are living the life of a contemporary man who is only spending his life, not really living it.

The study also addresses the issue of how gendered boundaries, such as those associated with matriarchy, transgenderism, and patriarchy, are ingrained in society. Each and every character in the book represents the dominance of men and women. As an illustration, Nida declares that men have authority over women in our patriarchal society. They treat women like their property and don't give a damn about their feelings or desires. Sasha, on the other hand, stands for matriarchal society. She appears to be living a life unencumbered by the restrictions and limitations of society. Bhanggi, the third main character in the narrative, is a declaration of those people who are not deemed deserving of love or the ability to be loved. All of these boundaries, which have made today's society chaotic, are what Faiqa has attempted to draw attention to. It has been discovered that identity subversion occurs in today's society. The characters are demonstrating how other members of society subvert them. The fact that they don't make an effort to clarify who they are was noteworthy. When doing Bhanggi, for example, Nida does not attempt to make herself appear more appealing to her husband. However, Sasha, who is living a free life, ignores her house and hangs out with the men outside. Her desire for a life of luxury has caused a rift in her family, which has an impact on her husband's and child's lives. Not to mention, Bhanggi has an inferiority complex due to an odd form of hysteria that he has developed. It is still a fact that he appears to be taking his time becoming accepted by society.



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