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## Navigating Cultural Norms: A Study of Gender Performativity and Intersectionality in Umera Ahmed's *Man O Salwa*

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### **Abstract**

*This research probes into Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity in life of Umera Ahmed's selected work Man O Salwa's female protagonist Zainab. Drawing on normativity and fluidity areas of Butler's gender performativity theory, this research further explores the deep impacts of complex interplay of gender and other identity factors such as class, culture, familial relationships, socio-economic pressures on female protagonist's subjugation. This study aims to investigate that how all of this axis of identity intersects and make life more complicated for female protagonist and the other female characters around her. This research demonstrates the process of normalization of conventional roles assigned to a woman by her patriarchal culture. It further manifests deeply the strenuous struggles of female protagonist and the other female characters around her to cope with these traditional gender performances. This study portrays the journey of female protagonist from a conventional woman to an autonomous being and then again to a puppet of patriarchal culture.*

**Keywords:** Gender Performativity, Gender Roles, Normativity, Intersectionality, Internalized Oppression

### **Introduction**

The main purpose of carrying out this research is to investigate deeply the ways in which female protagonist of Man O Salwa forms her identity while fighting decisive battles against suffocating gender roles, gender performances and other intersecting factors of identity such as class distinctions, cultural norms, socioeconomic issues, according to her patriarchal society. The research slowly unveils the process of construction as well as deconstruction of gender identities in life of female ring leader from selected work of Umera Ahmed within diverse cultural background. The aim behind the research is to probe into the impacts of conventional gender performances given by subjugated women to please their patriarchal societies and normative standards of culture. Furthermore, this research aims to give voice to those women who are at intersection of multiple identities and suffer more as compared to the women who are at top of social hierarchies.

The choice of gender performativity as a theoretical framework is favored due to its relevance with journey of female protagonist Zainab from chosen novel. Gender performativity theory, proposed by Judith Butler in her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble* is selected as a theoretical framework in this research. Butler in her concept of performativity declares that gender is not an inborn identity or a biological concept, rather it is simply an act or performance given by an individual for years until it becomes an identity of that person or of his/her group (Butler 191). She further delves into the idea of normativity that these gendered

performances are the outcomes of interference of culture and society in identity formation, their reality lies in societal norms (Butler 192). The selected work of Umera Ahmed, *Man O Salwa* plunges into the themes of normativity, female agency, gender empowerment, reshaping identities, family and relationships, intersectionality, socio economic resilience and internalized oppression. The plot of *Man O Salwa* revolves around main female character Zainab who hails from a middle-class family of Pakistan. Zainab is portrayed as a stereotypical lady who is performing the role of a conventional woman and fulfilling her traditional gender roles as a daughter, as a sister and as a fiancée, while at the same time fighting with socio economic issues in her middle-class family. Despite of all of these trials and tribulations, she is contented with her fiancé. However, her happiness does not prove to be long lasting and it vanishes by betrayal of her fiancé which is the outcome of low ranking of her family in terms of social status. She turns the weakness of hers into her strength and her life takes a revolutionary turn after this betrayal as she abandons her gender roles by entering into the profession of modeling. She portrays resilience against her gender performances set according to normative standards of her culture. However, due to continuous mockery and remarks of people around her regarding her character compel her to commit suicide. The purpose behind the selection of this work is that it fulfills all the main components of performativity theory. It portrays the themes of gender performativity, normativity and intersectionality.

#### **Research Aim**

The purpose of carrying out this research is to investigate the impacts of identity factors such as class, culture, economic instability, familial relationships on gender performances. It further aims to investigate the deep and long lasting effects of cultural norms on Man O Salwa's female protagonist's life.

#### **Research Objective**

. To investigate the intersection of different factors such as class, culture, socioeconomic issues, relational status with gender in reshaping female protagonist's experiences.

#### **Research Questions**

- 1- In the narrative of *Man O Salwa*, how do internalized oppression influenced by gender performances and cultural norms contribute to the death of Zainab from *Man O Salwa*?
- 2- To what extent do class, culture, economic issues and gender intersect in shaping the identity of Zainab from *Man O Salwa*?

#### **Literature Review**

In recent years, gender has become a central topic for discussion in literature. There have been tons of works on complex dynamics of gender roles, realities of gender performances, identity struggles and resilience of women against patriarchal values of their culture and society. The following literature review intends to build new researches based on previous existing works on topics related to gender identities and gender roles. This literature review has a purpose to create deeper understandings of ways in which gender roles are portrayed, constructed, deconstructed and negotiated in literature.

*Gender Outlaw*, written by Kate Bornstein is an autobiographical work which finds out that gender roles are assigned to a person at time of his/her birth and it's the culture which explains to us that who we are and what we have to do (Bornstein 22). As she further illustrates her notion that gender identity answers the question that who a person is, whether he is a man or

a woman or a what, gender identity is surrounding all the identity factors of a person (Bornstein 24). Her work is parallel to this research as it talks about constructed gendered identities through repeated gender performances. Bornstein's idea of cultural interference in gender roles is also profitable for this research as main point of research is normativity.

Anne Fausto Sterling aligns central idea of her work *Sexing the Body: Gender politics and the Construction of Sexuality* with the main concept of Butler's performativity theory that gender is entirely a socially constructed identity which comes into being as a result of interference of cultural norms and it has not any kind of connection with biological identity of humans (Sterling 47). Sterling further extends her idea that social construction of identity factors not only influence gender roles but also impact our ways of perceiving and categorizing bodies (Sterling 50). Her findings are quite helpful in building this research as her idea of social construction goes parallel with Butler's concept of gender construction. Moreover, her work is helpful in this research for detection of main characters' involvement in construction and deconstruction of their gendered identities. However, the research takes a step forward by going into the detailed process of development of gendered identities and gender roles.

Drawing on Judith Butler's idea of gender's social construction, West and Zimmerman's work "Doing Gender" delves into an idea that gender is not any special kind of trait which is only associated with some specific sex, rather it is the product of social doings (West and Zimmerman 126). And doing gender simply means creating unnatural distinctions between men and women which categorize their rights and responsibilities according to unnecessary cultural demands and societal requirements (West and Zimmerman 126). This scholarly work of West and Zimmerman in a nutshell aligns itself with the core concept of Butler's gender performativity theory. And this alignment strengthens theoretical framework of this research, providing a deeper comprehension of procedures through which gender is enacted and resisted in literature.

Shulamith Firestone in her book titled as *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* argues that patriarchy is now a part of societal structures to such an extent that it does not feel new, it seems that it has become the part of this patriarchal structure now (Firestone 156). She further examines that cultural values are most of the times set by men that is why they represent women and other things only through their own view and perception which harms women as they are unaware of reality (Firestone 158). She further notices that almost every culture is corrupted by sexual polarization (Firestone 167). Her findings are valuable in this research as this study mainly defies patriarchal values of society which shape gender roles. As her main focus is on real life experiences of gender inequality, her ideas are helpful in giving a shape to the following research. Her notions give direction to this research by highlighting the influence of social expectations on gender performances of female characters from selected novel for this research.

Luce Irigaray touches upon the idea of normativity in her work *This Sex Which Is Not One* which resonates with Butler's ideas of social construction of gender roles. According to the definition of normativity, cultural norms and societal structures are the reasons of gendered performances given by individuals especially women. The afflictions and trials women confront in their life are always considered trivial or meaningless in male centered societies. (Irigaray 106-118). She further asserts that to explain the idea of feminine in form of a single concept is as similar as to be caught up again in system of masculine representations

because men are the ones who have defined women (Irigaray 122). As this work of Irigaray is about gender inequalities and social construction of gender roles, it shows similarities with theoretical framework of this research. Her ideas about power imbalance in patriarchal societies are helpful in analyzing the journey of female protagonist from selected work for this research.

bell hooks' work *Feminism is for Everyone* aligns with this research perfectly as she talks about intersection of gender with class and race, she further delves into the impacts of these social hierarchies in women's way to autonomy and independence (hooks, *Feminism for Everyone*, 23). As the research is mainly about intersection of gender with other identity factors, hooks' work provides a deeper understanding of main protagonist's struggles from selected work *Man O Salwa*. Her work acts as a shield for those women who are often ignored because they are at intersection of various identity axis. In another work titled as *Ain't I a Woman?* hooks discusses the influence of race and class over perceptions of beauty, sexuality, and motherhood

(hooks 17). This concept of hers goes parallel with Butler's concept of fluidity of gender that gender roles do not remain same from class to class, culture to culture and time to time.

Audre Lorde has written various essays and works in which she has talked about the deep impacts of intersectionality on women who are at margins of different identity factors and bear twice of oppression because of it. As she herself belong to a different race, that is why most of her feminist works talk about her own life experiences. Her phenomenal work *Sister Outsider* is a collection of her essays and speeches which she has written in her whole life. She has discussed the impacts of intersectionality on subjugation of women and has introduced a new concept of anger in her works (Lorde 128). Her concept of anger is helpful in giving a direction to this research as main female protagonist's journey begins with the spark of anger.

Angela Y Davis also explores the idea of intersectionality as she argues that women's servitude cannot be understood without discussing the impacts of other intersecting identity factors (Davis 27). She makes a comparison between women from high societies and women from lower class and also portrays impacts of oppression on working class women as well as women from lower class families who are already dealing with economic issues (Davis 30). Purpose of her work is to terminate a single definition of women, as women have diverse backgrounds, nature of oppression on them is also different from each other. She further stresses over the recognition of struggles faced by women from different race, class and culture (Davis 35). Her study perfectly correlates with experiences of female protagonist from selected work as she grapples with issues related to her intersecting identity factors. Davis's ideas are quite helpful in pointing out the direction for this research.

Kimberlé Crenshaw as the first feminist who ever introduced the idea of intersectionality argues in her work *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color*, that systematic structures exclude and marginalize those women who are at intersection of many other identity factors (Crenshaw 1245). Those women are facing intersectional oppression are suffering more, yet no one has given attention towards them. Crenshaw is the first feminist who introduced a new direction to feminism. Women who are facing subjugation not only because of their gender but because of many intersecting identity factors that are part of their identity according to society make life difficult for them. Female protagonist from selected work is also facing this tumultuous pain, that is why this study by Crenshaw is helpful in discussing her problems and analyzing her journey.

Aforementioned literature review has portrayed an overview of existing literature on gender performances of women in patriarchal societies, impacts of intersectionality on their subjugation and their struggles for their autonomy discussed within literature. However, there seemed a need for further exploration of intersection of gender performances with other axes of identity which this research probes into.

### **Research Methodology**

The research is qualitative which aids in developing the understanding of the selected novel. This research contributes effectively to valuable insights and give a comprehensive outlook to selected field of research. For further understanding, character analysis is used as basic research methodology, focusing in the evolution of female protagonist. This involves thorough observation of character, traits, dialogues, actions and relationships of protagonist as well as her response to various situations in her life. Character analysis further maps out tumultuous journey of protagonist as she goes through various stages of evolution in her life. It further carves out the impacts of other people on gender performances of female protagonist especially female characters around her.

Full analysis of protagonist's character is helpful for determination of her journey towards her independence and autonomy. A close examination of *Man O Salwa's* female protagonist Zainab is conducted for deeper understanding. Her life from the very beginning, her background circumstances, her gender performances, her point of realization, her journey towards evolution, and her decision of taking her own life, everything is closely examined. The text of novel is taken as primary source and for better understanding secondary sources are also analyzed. By employing character analysis, this research strives to show the impacts of gender performances and intersectionality on protagonist's life.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Gender performativity theory is given by Judith Butler in her various works especially *Gender Trouble* written in 1990. The main notion of theory revolves around a concept that gender is neither innate nor fixed, rather it is constructed through repeated acts or performances given by an individual (Butler 191). It means that when something is repetitive, it produces series of effects and become the recognition of performer. If a woman is performing her gender, those performances become her gender roles, not of her but for all the women around the globe. Butler's performativity theory is inspired from Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction, Michael Foucault's idea of power, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist thoughts, John Langshaw Austin's notion of performative utterances and many other scholars. These scholars have played an immense role in production of Butler's gender performativity theory. Then comes the factor of normativity that gender's construction is a result of societal expectations and cultural norms. The expectations that a patriarchal society has with women compel a woman to play her role as a gendered woman according to demands and expectations of her culture. However, as Butler states, "Possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192), which proves that gender has fluid nature, if it can be constructed, deconstruction can also happen. A woman has power to show resilience against these gender performances and gender roles which are continuously choking her. As it is seen in case of Zainab, from selected novel *Man O Salwa* who shows resistance all of subjugating roles of

gender which gave her nothing except pain and insult. This research through the lens of performativity theory analyze the journey of female protagonist revolving around gender performativity and performativity failure.

Performativity theory given by Butler has operated in many fields and it can be applied to any aspect of literature where concept of normativity and gender inequalities is discussed. Many researchers have given their utmost efforts to build new ideas from performativity theory and extend Butler's notions. This research is one of those researches who has endeavored to bring a new perspective in history of literature.

### Analysis

The following chapter probes into the oppression and servitude faced by female protagonist of *Man O Salwa* due to the interference of her patriarchal society in creation of her gendered identity through the lens of Butler's idea of gender performativity. Moreover, this chapter also discusses deeply the role of intersectionality in adding to the oppression of Zainab. It analyses the drastic impacts of intersection of class, culture, relational status, societal norms, economic constraints and gender on difficult journey of Zainab. The story of selected novel revolves around Zainab who is introduced as a conventional woman as she mechanically plays her gender roles continuously. As she hails from a lower middle-class family, that is why she is suffering from financial issues at the same time. Her adherence to stereotypical roles of women portray that her whole personality is socially constructed. Her adherence to her gender roles can be inferred according to Butler's idea of performativity that repetition of same gender performances produces societal norms, they become recognition of that person (Butler 191).

Zainab is portrayed as an obedient and selfless being who prioritize others' emotions and sentiments over her. She is engaged to her cousin from very young age by wish and command of her parents (Ahmed 23) which demonstrates her role as a conventional daughter whose duty is to abide by her parents' decisions regarding her own life without inquiring anything. Her loyalty towards her relations and decisions of her relatives is portrayed through her acts of faithfulness for her fiancée. She wakes up in winter mornings just to pray extra nawafil for her fiancé's job (Ahmed 17) and whenever she is asked to pray for herself too, she replies innocently that her fate is linked with Shiraz's, if he is successful, she will be automatically a fortunate woman (Ahmed 18). By doing acts of selflessness while ignoring her own needs and wishes, she is indirectly engaging herself in reconstruction of gendered identities and gender roles. As Maheen Hamayun writes in *Feminism of Our Mothers* under the heading of "The Stories We Tell Ourselves"

"Sexism isn't simply perpetuated by men. We've grown up socialized in a way that drives us to believe in the construction of gender and that leads to the creation of powerful patriarchal systems (Hamayun 161). Similarly, Zainab is grown up in a family where these selfless practices by females to satisfy their male counterparts are not extraordinary things, rather they are considered pretty normal.

The gender roles of males from a patriarchal society, are portrayed rightly in form of male characters of *Man O Salwa*. Shiraz, fiancée of Zainab as well as kinsman of her is portrayed as a man who fulfills all the requirements of a self-centered man. He often asserts his dominance over females of his family including his mother, sisters and even Zainab. In accordance with Butler's vision that norms may not be visible clearly, still play their part in

normalizing principle in social practice, they remain hidden still produce clear effects in lives of individuals (Butler 41), Shiraz's behavior is outcome of these hidden norms explicit in his patriarchal society and male centered culture. However, Shiraz's aggressiveness has another reason which can be illustrated through the lens of intersectionality. His joblessness and lower middle-class status is another reason for his frustration and his anger is borne by poor females of his family (Ahmed 21). Despite all of his trials and tribulations, Zainab's endless support is always with him as her society demands selflessness from her in every situation. Anca Gheaus in her work "Feminism and Gender" points out that in our patriarchal societies, gender is designed in various forms as first thing we notice is difference of treatment towards men and women, which further results in form of various privileges for men (Gheaus 167). This statement of

Gheaus explains the behavior of Shiraz as he is pampered by women of his family including his mother, sisters and even Zainab. In various instances from novel, it is clear that Shiraz's mother Naseem shows an unequal amount of affection towards her son and daughters (Ahmed 20) which further perpetuates a sense of dominance in him. In a significant starting scene of *Man O Salwa*, Shiraz polishes his shoes before going for a job interview, his mother almost jumps over him angrily by rebuking him over polishing his shoes by own, she says, "I don't understand why you are polishing your shoes; you should have told me and either I or one of your sisters would have done it (Ahmed 20). This pampering results in form of a norm that he is always right and this behavior is illustrated by Butler, "A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its exploration (Butler 41). In accordance with Butler's words, Shiraz's behavior is normalized for women of his family and they have to mold themselves according to his wishes and commands.

Butler's idea also explains the deep penetration of cultural norms within daily practices and their aftereffects.

Zainab's stereotypical gender performances are strengthened by female characters around her including her conventional mother and two sisters. Her elder sister Zehra who is mother of two girls is often kicked out of her house by her husband and in laws (Ahmed 76) and reasons are dowry and birth of daughters (Ahmed 76). Her husband always threatens her in name of divorce which is a social stigma in patriarchal cultures. Women who are divorced often face criticism, that is why Zainab's elder sister Zehra is taught to be patient and obedient by her parents (Ahmed 76). Her cultural values intersect with Zehra's gender; her worth is determined by things which are not even in her control. Another identity factor, low ranking in social classes, intersect with gender in Zehra's case. Zehra is bearing oppression not just because she is woman, also because of her meagre financial resources. Another identity axis relational status also goes parallel with other identities, as Zehra's husband is son-in-law who belongs to a patriarchal society, therefore, his status is automatically raised. Giving son-in-laws utmost respect so they can treat their wives best is a common practice in male oriented cultures. Chimamanda Ngazi Adichie has written a groundbreaking work on relation of culture and gender titled as *We should all be Feminists*, in which she argues that culture does not build an individual, those are individuals who make culture (Adichie 46). Similarly, treatment of Zehra's family towards her husband is conforming his gender identity which is patriarchal in nature.

Moreover, Zehra's family's response to this alarming situation further adds to the afflictions of Zehra and her daughters.

According to Butler's concept of performativity, gender comes into being through repetition of an act or performance (Butler 191) and these gendered performances are portrayed as a part of female characters of *Man O Salwa*. For an example, Zehra's mother is a source of these gender-based performances for her daughters. She knowingly or unknowingly, reiterates this cycle of subjugation among her daughters. She is shown as a woman who is in severe inferiority complex for being a mother of three daughters and she portrays this sense of inferiority in many places. In one scene she disappointedly mentions that being a mother of girls, she is not worthy of speaking, therefore it is better choice to stay silent even if something oppressive is happening with her girls (Ahmed 42). Her views regarding the birth of her granddaughter also explicit internalized oppression of their culture where these kinds of words are pretty normal.

Butler states, "... normativity refers to the process of normalization, the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal men and women (Butler 206). In accordance with Butler's aforementioned idea, Zainab and Zehra's obedience and their mother's remarks over their sufferings prove that everything which is happening to her daughters is normal for her. Zainab's gender performances are results of her family's situation and she strives hard to save her relationship with Shiraz. He once opens up in front of her that a man's wife should be someone who catches everyone's attention (Ahmed 11) and Zainab takes this very seriously, she does everything to become a perfect wife. As Adichie mentions that girls are brought up with an idea that they should be likeable and this is their only trait, this includes everything according to societal demands (Adichie 24). And Zainab's gender performances have now become her gender identity rather than choice. Her sacrifices for her relationship are shown by various examples from the novel as in the beginning it is mentioned that Zainab's family cannot afford meat twice a month (Ahmed 24). Therefore, whenever her father brings meat home, she separates her portion for Shiraz (Ahmed 24). This act of sacrifice portrays the effects of gender roles in a patriarchal society where women have duty to take care of their male counterparts by cutting off their own necessities.

Beauvoir mentions in her work *The Second Sex* that man never considers woman while dreaming about his future while women are so dependent on men that they cannot even imagine themselves without men, moreover everything about her life is decided by man (Beauvoir 6). The aforementioned scenes illustrate that only Zainab in this relationship is putting all of her efforts and energy while Shiraz only knows how to take. These acts of sacrifices are shown by Zainab in various scenes as in one scene she without thinking gives her hard earned gold bangles to Shiraz for his job interview (Ahmed 27). Moreover, she asserts that if she has anything valuable and it is still unable to help him, it has no use for her (Ahmed 27). This gesture of her can be analyzed by Butler's idea that a person cannot perform his/her gender by his/her own, there is always someone behind these gender performances and that someone can be imaginary (Butler 1). Zainab is an educated girl who unlike her elder sister knows to fight for her rights, however unknowingly she is caught in web of gender expectations which propel her to fulfill her gender performances according to her cultural norms, while her patriarchal culture demands sacrifices from girls to save their relationships. She is taught that everything belongs to her is now Shiraz's possession and she has to do everything to make him happy with her. Even though



Zainab belongs to a lower middle-class family, she saves up money for Shiraz's birthday gift by keeping herself away from good dresses, snacks from canteen and many other necessities. This act of selfness portrays Zainab's part in saving this relationship with Shiraz. Her relational status and meagre number of resources intersect with her gender here and create more hurdles for her. As Marry Holmes explains this intersection of gender and class in her work *Gender and Everyday Life* that class differences are created when people do something different just to distinguish themselves from others. Class hierarchy also involves particular ways of doing gender (Holmes 43). According to Holmes ideas, Zainab and her family strive hard to maintain their social standings because they are not economically stable. Gender performances change from class to class and Zainab's lower middle class demands from her more sacrifices.

However, these sacrifices are halted by cruel betrayal of Shiraz who after getting a reputable civil job, leaves her afterwards because of her lower social status and marries a wealthy lady. Here factor of intersectionality penetrates in their relationship as Zainab's financial status becomes another reason of oppression for her. He inquires his family whether they feel that they would make a good or perfect couple when he has become a renowned civil officer however, she still is a daughter of lower middle class family (Ahmed 129). And to break off the engagement, he needs a solid reason, that's why he corrupts her character by saying that she is a slut who has relationships with men of her street (Ahmed 143). This last blow seems severe as people in neighborhood start gossiping about Zainab's character (Ahmed 161). Zainab's whole life's piousness is in front of the whole world still they choose to believe Shiraz and the reason is simple. Shiraz who has gotten a good civil services job and his social ranking is above Zainab's family, moreover he is a man while Zainab is a woman, therefore they think that they can get benefits from Shiraz in future while there is no use of a lower middle-class woman for them.

The bitter betrayal by Shiraz and people around her propels Zainab to undergo a different journey towards revenge by becoming equal to Shiraz in social standings. That's why she opts modeling as her career (Ahmed 165) although she knows that modeling is considered a taboo for girls from middle- or lower-class families. She faces a severe backlash from her community (Ahmed 168) as her gender roles do not expect this resilience from a woman. When her father reminds her cultural norms that girls from respectable families, in other words middle class families do not opt for these kinds of professions, she harshly questions their authenticity, "What choice do they have? Get beaten up for not bringing enough of dowry? Get engagements broken for not having the means to provide a handsome dowry? Without money, no family is considered respectable" (Ahmed 169). She starts questioning the authenticity of gender performances structured by patriarchal cultures. However, she is in dilemma because of her desire to confront her ex as an autonomous lady while internalized oppression in her and her family's mind propel her to return to a conventional woman. This feeling of betraying her cultural values are sparked by her father's death and her own mother forbids her to attend the funeral of her father, she shrieks that Zainab herself is responsible for her father that is why she does not any right to attend his funeral, she is solely the cause of destruction of her family (Ahmed 218). The death of her beloved father and then her mother's blaming push her towards a phase of depression, however an urge to be independent takes her out of this situation. When she steps in media industry, she comes to realize that even there, men are considered superior, however she carves out her own path there (Ahmed 415). She defies her gender identity and asserts her autonomy. While on the other hand, her cheater ex fiancé is trapped in a toxic relationship where his wife

does not consider him more than a pet dog bought for her by her wealthy father (Ahmed 311). This reversal of fortune serves as a regret for him that why did he leave his loyal fiancé for sake of wealth and social status. In his deep regret, he tries to contact his ex-fiancé, Zainab and she exposes his evil side in front of the whole world (Ahmed 565). This reaction of Zainab proves her as an autonomous being who is no longer afraid of her society and culture. While unveiling

Shiraz's true nature in front of the whole world, her own past is exposed in front of those people who admire her because of her glamorous present, however all of these things do not affect her, as her sole purpose was to take revenge from Shiraz.

Cultural norms and gender performances take years to build up, that is why they are not easy to be forsaken. They are penetrated in minds deeper than anyone can imagine, as Butler states, "Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its exploration"

(Butler 41). In accordance with Butler's words, deep down in Zainab's mind, there is still an effect of these gender performances. When she finally decides to move on as an ordinary girl, behavior and words of people make her believe that she is no longer a girl of good character (Ahmed 650) and she has betrayed her culture. The internalized oppression in her mind reminds her the death of her father again and she commits suicide while throwing herself out of her apartment window (Ahmed 662). However, her suicide can be seen as her attempt to come out of this web of oppression and subjugation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, through portrayal of Zainab's uneven journey, this research reflects the influence of cultural norms and class dynamics over her gender performances. However, after betrayal of her fiancé, Zainab's decision to venture into the profession of modeling to take revenge from Shiraz and all those people who blamed her, explicit her desire to be free from the sufferings of gender performances. Yet the internalized oppression in her mind and life compels her to take her own life. Despite all of her efforts to be free from cultural constraints and gender performances, she remains influenced by her cultural norms and expectations. Her story serves as a reminder for readers and researchers to delve deeply about agony and affliction of those women who are at intersection of different identities and face more backlash and subjugation from their patriarchal cultures. In short, Zainab's journey unveils the importance of examining intersection of various identities while examining gender inequalities. This research demands a reevaluation of gender performances influenced by cultural norms as well as deconstruction of various identity factors through new researches from future researchers.

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