

SOCIAL ANARCHISM AND ABJECTION: READING GRIEF AND GUILT IN USMAN ALI'S ANGLOPHONE PLAYS

By

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Social Anarchism and Abjection: Reading Grief and Guilt in Usman Ali's Anglophone Plays

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Candidate of **Doctor of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Social Anarchism and Abjection: Reading Grief and Guilt in Usman Ali's Anglophone Plays** submitted by me in partial fulfilment of PhD degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution. I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled, and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: Social Anarchism and Abjection: Reading Grief and Guilt in Usman Ali's Anglophone Plays

Pakistani English dramatist Usman Ali, through his dramatic art form, tries to subvert hierarchies of power that take advantage of the socioeconomic circumstances of the masses. Through his dramatic oeuvre, he showcases elements of anarchism and resistance among the people in a postcolonial country like Pakistan. However, his characters only seem to suffer through grief and the resultant guilt, two psychological states of mind that do not qualify them as revolutionaries *per se* who may challenge the established state order and control. Passive resistance through utter grief seems to be the hallmark of Ali's characters and their actions. For this purpose, Bakunin's perspective on anarchism is invoked. The anarchist viewpoint best fits Ali's characters as a means of liberating themselves from the socio-political forces that oppress them. Anarchism and guilt share a dialectical relationship; they are different yet run parallel to each other. Anarchism is an action that devolves around chaos and evolves into change. Similarly, guilt spirals into depression or becomes the catalyst for transformation. Guilt is not embarrassment, but the guilt of inaction in the time of action, hence a moment of change and transformation for Ali's characters. Through his characters' personal growth, Ali seeks to galvanise his readers and viewers to question norms, societal structures and institutions, thereby fostering anarchist thought. Invoking Kristeva's theory of abjection, this study also finds the socio-psychic conditions of the marginalised population, including the artists in Pakistan. The abject has no social position, so it's the Other. Elisabeth Kubler Ross's "Theory of Grief" is also employed as a supporting lens for the representation of grief, and death as the abject, the social norms centred around it and how grief can arise from the death of not just the physical body, but ideas, way of life, dreams and aspirations. The study finds out that Ali's dramaturgy posits the dramatic form as a process whereby man's psyche and imagination defer, confront, and re-describe the lived reality. Grief of marginalization, the discomfort and psychological conflict arising from the socio-economic circumstances act as a stimulus which ultimately leads to contemplation about their miseries. Since Pakistani Anglophone literature in general, but drama in particular has failed to garner desired critical attention, this research is an attempt to bring it into the global critical limelight.

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DEDICATION

**I dedicate my humble work to my
beloved parents**

Syed Zaheer-ul-Hussain and Rashida Zaheer

my brothers and friends

Zain Ali Zaheer & Hussain Ali Zaheer

and the light of my life

Ayleen Zainab

**and to all those who touched my heart and
mind in my life.**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In many postcolonial societies, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and India, drama as a literary and performing arts genre started to develop, in the wake of de/colonization, in the hands of such masters as Derek Walcott, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka. Street and protest theatre companies were established to create political consciousness and resistance among the masses at the grassroots level. Since Pakistan, both as a state and society, failed to become post-colonial, its indigenous art forms also did not prosper even after Independence. What is dubbed as social drama developed some roots in the hands of Imtiaz Ali Taj before and after the Independence. With the sole exception of Taufiq Rafat, no significant literary playwright emerged until Usman Ali came to the scene in recent years. The absence of a serious tradition and practice of drama has left a void that has been filled with commercial theatre known for its obscenity that caters to the taste of lower-middle classes in Pakistan. On the contrary, in India, drama and theatre have flourished and have contributed to the performing skills of many Bollywood actors who were initially trained in stage acting.

Usman Ali has yet to make his mark in the literary circles of Pakistan. However, he received critical acclaim abroad when his plays, *The Guilt* and *The Last Metaphor* were published in 2014. Afterwards, Ali excelled in his creative talent and wrote three more plays, *The Odyssey* (2016), *The Breath* and *The Flute* (2017). His works have a strong cultural and societal connection to Pakistan as his characters belong to everyday Pakistani society. In his blurb of *The Last Metaphor*, Edward Bond wrote that "Ali lives in a society where experience is immediate and direct." (45). This suggests that Ali's works are a mirror of the socio-psychological circumstances of the people coping with many difficulties in Pakistani society. Usman Ali earned his Masters in Philosophy from Punjab University in Lahore, Pakistan, and now resides in Mandi Bahauddin district in Punjab. *Hamlet's Madness:*

Feigned or Real (2000), a dramatic adaptation of Usman Ali's work, was performed in Lahore as part of the British Council's celebration of Shakespeare's Birthday. Madeeha Gohar, who was the co-founder and director of Ajoka Theatre, witnessed that production. However, his translation of Gulzar's work, *The Speaking Silence* (2007), was his first book to be published.

The International Writing Program at Iowa University is renowned for bringing together authors from all over the world, and Ali who had also won the Taufiq Rafat Drama Prize in 2016, joined the program in 2018. Later, the Royal Court Theatre in London hosted productions of Ali's plays. He also founded Ali's Theatre, a performance space in Mandi Bahauddin in a former sub-campus of the University of Sargodha. This campus stopped functioning a couple of years ago. Ali's Theatre is no longer active despite his repeated attempts to restore it. Ali's artistic outpourings, the social relevance of his drama as well and his struggles to establish art with theatre, despite many economic hardships, inspired me to work on this research project.

It is worth noting that Western playwrights like Edward Bond and Elizabeth Kuti have praised Ali's works. Edward Bond critically acclaimed both *The Last Metaphor* and *The Odyssey* with blurbs for the published editions. Bond argues that Ali's presentation and storytelling skills are portrayed in *The Last Metaphor*, depicting 'raw experiences' (45) in dramatic form. "Raw experiences", according to Bond, are the direct, day-to-day experiences. He adds that Usman Ali depicts human relationships most accurately. In his review of *The Odyssey*, Bond praises Ali's artistic brilliance in bringing history to current situations. *The Odyssey* illustrates not just the violence prevalent in society, but also the "quest for explanation and meaning" (Bond, 43) in times of societal unrest and apathy.

Claire Chambers explains her visit to Pakistan, and her connection with Ajoka Theatre and Shahid Nadeem, in her newspaper article "A Scene in Mandi Bahauddin. During a seminar in Mandi Bahauddin, Chambers witnessed a performance of *The Last Metaphor* in Ali's theatre. She contrasts Ali's Play with Shahid Nadeem's, a dramatist she considers radical. Ali is a disciple of Shahid Nadeem in drama writing, with the exception that Shahid Nadeem writes in indigenous languages such as Urdu, Seraiki, and Punjabi, whereas Ali writes in English. She goes on to suggest that Ali's *The Last Metaphor* and Shahid Nadeem's *The Dead Dog* share numerous similarities. She elaborates on *The Last Metaphor* as a drama that depicts the horrors of violence. Chambers views these Pakistani dramatists as Pakistan's best hope for preserving theatre and theatrical tradition.

1.1.1 A Brief History of Drama and Theatre in Pakistan

According to *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*, the word “drama” originated in the 16th century, but it is derived from the Greek word *dran* which means ‘to perform’ or ‘to act’. Theatre is a medium of presenting drama through performance. It is a means of communication through live performance and action and presenting dialogues through enactment.

Urdu theatre traditions are largely responsible for the growth of drama and theatre in Pakistan. According to Mohammad Aslam Qureshi, Urdu theatre began to flourish in the Subcontinent in the late 19th century, when Sanskrit theatre was on the decline (49). *Indra Sabha* was written in 1855 by Agha Hassan Amanat, who was inspired by Wajid Ali Shah, a *Kathak*¹ dancer who wrote on theatrical and practical elements of performing arts. Parsis established Urdu as the medium for commercial theatre in Northern India. Rehmani asserts that, initially, Urdu theatre combined dance and song with local traditions of plays based on ancient epics. Rehmani further argues that not only these themes influenced Parsi Theatre, but Shakespearean play adaptations performed in colleges by English troupes touring the Subcontinent also influenced Parsi Theatre. In Parsi Theatre, Agha Hashar Kashmiri's (1879-1935) Urdu adaptations of Shakespeare's plays were presented. These theatres also learned and implemented British lighting, costuming, and direction techniques (88).

After Pakistan's independence in 1947, Lahore became a cultural center, and it remains a key cultural hub of Punjab, Pakistan, to this day. Imtiaz Ali Taj and Patras Bukhari contributed massively to theatrical productions. Urdu theatre and its enriched history are incomplete without mentioning Sadat Hassan Manto. His work is on par with that of D. H. Lawrence. This comparison is drawn because, similar to Lawrence, he also addressed the subjects that were deemed socially unacceptable in his society. He discussed a wide range of subjects, including the inequality that existed in the subcontinent before and after the colonial rule. His writings on controversial topics such as love, sex, incest, prostitution, and the hypocrisy of traditional subcontinental men caused a significant uproar. He openly presented all the facts and accurately depicted the social situations, in complex fictional and dramatic structures, sharp satire, and clever humour.

¹ A classical dance in the Sub-Continent based on the art of storytelling

In the 1950s, a well-received and exclusive theatre movement gained pace thanks to the financial backing from a growing Pakistani oil industry. An outcome of this period was the formation of the Karachi Theatre in 1956, led by playwright Khwaja Moinuddin, actor Zia Mohyeddin, and Sigrid Nyberg Kahle, the Swedish wife of a German diplomat stationed in Pakistan (Brandon, 212). During the period of first martial law, commercial theatre in the country embraced naturalism and the generally harmless style of European drawing-room comedies, rather than the politically critical and stylised approach of Brechtian theatre (Pamment 115).

Pakistan's social fabric is stratified by class, hence art and literature are viewed as a privilege and linked with the elite or upper-middle classes alone. For this reason, serious Urdu and English theatres had been confined to educational institutions such as Government College, Lahore, and arts councils. The Government College Dramatic Club (GCDC) in Lahore was dedicated to producing the plays of politically provocative playwrights such as Ibsen, Shaw, and Gogol. Productions encompassing the presentation of European dramas were executed in both Urdu and English. The GCDC placed numerous influential individuals, including actors, directors, and writers, in prominent roles within Pakistan's mainstream theatre (Ahmed et al. 357). It is pertinent to mention Taufiq Rafat's *The Foothold*, an unpublished play with its manuscript preserved by Kinnard College's International Centre for Pakistani Writing in English. *The Foothold* is Pakistan's first full-length English play. Written in a post-colonial setting, *The Foothold* follows the journey of Saleem, who gives up friends, family, and financial possessions to discover who he is. Saleem wanders for six years, and during that time two pupils follow him, looking up to him and seeking his wisdom. Saleem is looking for answers, but as the play ends, he understands that the solutions are found in ordinary life, not in the wilderness. *The Foothold* has largely remained ignored, with only a select few performances and readings to date. The play asks essential existential and philosophical questions and focuses on the quest to find purpose in one's life. It deals with chaos and the static every day and how the Divine can be found anywhere, not just in isolated pockets of Nature.

In the 1960s and 1970s, these theatrical plays were deemed elitist since they took inspiration from Western culture and had few writings by indigenous authors. When the issue of attracting an audience arose, these dramas failed to attract the lower and middle classes. However, their contribution to theatre cannot be diminished, as they preserved this art form. The Pakistan Arts Council (PAC), a private organization shortly after independence, displayed an initial dedication to fostering the artistic culture of the newly

formed nation. In the 1960s, Pakistan Arts Council began regularly sponsoring theatrical performances. Facilitating the growth of innovative theatrical productions. The Pakistan Arts Council was renamed as the Lahore Arts Council, Alhamra, in 1981 (Pamment 115). In 1973, Pakistan's parliament established the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) through legislation to enhance the central government's responsibility in safeguarding and advancing the arts. The PNCA has created and supported commercial and repertory theatres in Pakistan. The PNCA currently occupies a purpose-built facility, specifically designed to accommodate multiple performing arts organisations. Several provinces have established their own arts councils, by the legal precedent set by parliament through the establishment of the PNCA. The PNCA has supported a yearly, multi-day, global drama festival in recent decades. This festival facilitates performances in Pakistan by international performing groups, while also highlighting Pakistani artists to a global audience. Pakistan hosts multiple national theatre festivals, which receive sponsorship from both provincial governments and private entities.

Punjab Lok RaHS commenced operations as an autonomous alternative theatre ensemble in 1986. The group has experienced various disruptions, both from within and from external sources, throughout its history. Since its inception, the group has consistently held an event every two weeks, on average. Initially, a collective of youthful individuals, predominantly students, emerged with a shared concern regarding the suppression of artistic and cultural endeavours by the military in Pakistan. The group highly values a society characterised by gender parity, democratic principles, universal respect for all individuals, and equal access to economic opportunities. RaHS advocates for systematic and deliberate endeavours to actualise this aspiration. The medium of theatre is its essence.

RaHS possesses extensive expertise in the field of theatre and has engaged in a wide range of theatrical activities, including staging classical epics, performing quick response street skits, developing foreign adaptations, improvising with community members, and participating in overseas festivals as well as in villages and urban slums. Through these endeavours, RaHS has addressed various social and cultural issues. RaHS's artistic repertoire encompasses a broad range of topics, including child marriage, women's autonomy in choosing their partners, and the staging of plays that denounce arms proliferation and military autocracy. In addition to conducting experiments and gaining practical knowledge, RaHS has acquired expertise in theatre through the guidance of influential figures such as Badal Sarkar. The members of this organisation have undergone training from various international institutions. The group has provided theatre training to several civil society

organisations as well. It has assisted numerous organisations by providing performances for the communities they serve.

Rahs derives inspiration from Punjab's native theatrical tradition. The name Rahs is derived from the Punjabi term for a regional style of theatre, and its logo prominently features the fundamental props used in this form of theatre. The group's objective is to combine tradition with contemporary techniques and concepts, transforming it into a powerful instrument for organisations dedicated to promoting social change. Rahs exclusively stage theatrical productions in the native language of its spectators, specifically the Punjabi-speaking population. The group contends that the native language is a fundamental aspect of cultural identity and plays a pivotal role in the political struggle of marginalised social classes in our region. The group not only engages in theatrical performances but also imparts training to other dramatic societies and community organisations, enabling them to utilise theatre as an art form and as an effective means of communication.

In rural Punjab, folk theatre absorbed folklore and musical storytelling based on traditional rhythms and melodies in the form of *Nautanki*² and *Tamasha*³. Punjabi and Urdu commercial theatre, which included *Juggat*⁴, flourished concurrently with elitist theatre. However, as time passed, the quality of the content degenerated into crude humour and vulgar dances, but the fact that it attracted the masses speaks volumes about the state of art and literature in Pakistan. Hence, Urdu theatre was also under the influence of such commercial dances known as *Mujra*⁵ as well as the local slapstick and improvisation comedy known as *Bhand*⁶ (Jalibi, 26).

Commercial theatre was introduced in Lahore during the early 1980s. The collaborative endeavours of Naheed Khanum, Amanullah, Mastana, and Baboo Baral introduced a new form of artistic expression characterised by vibrant dialogues and inventive techniques, which invigorated the citizens. Initially, the plays were staged at Alhamra, but due to renovations taking place in 1981-1982, a new venue had to be found. In the latter half of the 1980s. Moin Akhtar and Umar Sharif became the popular names of commercial theatre. Moin Akhtar and Umer Sharif's stand-up comedy and stage

² A popular term for folk performance in South Asia

³ A show or entertainment involving dance along with singing

⁴ A term in Punjabi language used for words, phrases or sentences in comedy intending pun and double meaning

⁵ An exotic dance performed by the courtesans in the Mughal Empire

⁶ Used for comic and folk entertainers in Subcontinent

performances, characterised by their serious delivery and demeanour, had a transformative impact on Pakistani theatre. They catalysed the emergence of sequels, spinoffs, and imitations, shifting the focus from traditional song-and-dance productions to ones centred around satire, comedy, improvisation, and often relying on stereotypical characterisations.

The collaborative endeavours of both actors to maintain theatre for entertainment purposes were over-shadowed by those of their peers, both in Lahore and Karachi, as most of their peers employed innuendos, indecent dance sequences, and low-quality storytelling to sustain their careers. For two decades, theatre was shunned by the public and regarded with the same disdain as the films of that era. Indeed, Umer Sharif transitioned from theatre to film, while Moin Akhtar moved from theatre to Television. However, Umer Sharif's triumph was ephemeral, but both the film industry and theatre experienced a significant decline towards the end of the previous century.

Regrettably, the realm of commercial theatre is presently experiencing a decline, even though the number of audiences attending theatrical performances is consistently rising. Every script must receive approval from the Punjab Arts Council (PAC). As a result, there is a scarcity of newly written scripts for commercial theatrical productions. Actors spontaneously create their dialogues, highlighting their rapid thinking abilities, which is the main attraction for the audience. Lahore is home to five private theatres namely Tamaseel, Mehfil, Naz, Crown, and Alfalah, as well as a government theatre called Alhamra. The moral brigade frequently asserts allegations of obscenity and advocates for the shutdown of commercial theatres in Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Multan, and Sahiwal. The majority of complaints stem from a small community of fanatics, whereas most people derive pleasure from the performances.

In Lahore, the popularity of performances can be determined by the fact that a majority of the audience comprises individuals from other cities. The theatres are filled to capacity over the weekends. A theatrical production typically spans 16 days and generates an approximate revenue of two million rupees during this period. The ticket prices range from Rs. Two hundred to Rs. 1,000. Despite the wide spread dislike for commercial theatres, they consistently sell out for the entire duration of their shows. As previously mentioned, commercial theatres are widely adored, although not universally. The performances rely on clever remarks and quick exchanges, highlighting the skilful and playful use of comedic intelligence. Nevertheless, an individual who dedicates ten hours per day, five days per week, is not seeking mundane or unexciting forms

of amusement. These theatres offer a rejuvenating perspective on life through their comedic performances, which are then enthusiastically embraced by the audience.

Exploiting the enduring nature of this renowned theatre, Tamaseel, which may be the first commercial theatre in Pakistan specifically designed and constructed for this purpose, was built in Lahore in 1991 (Ahmed et al 363). Additional theatres were established in various locations throughout the city. In contrast to the prevailing global pattern in the twentieth century, which involved the conversion of theatres into cinema halls, certain cinema halls in Lahore were renovated during the 1990s to serve as live theatres. In 2009, there were bomb explosions at the Tamaseel and three other Lahore theatres, resulting in injuries to ten individuals. This incident served as a reminder of the existence of factions within the country that are opposed to the performing arts and theatre, specifically. (Mason et al, 271) The central government established the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) in Karachi in 2005 to enhance the status of the performing arts in Pakistan. The school offers instructional programs for music, dance, design, and theatre. Late Zia Mohyeddin, a co-founder of the Karachi Theatre and a graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, was designated as the inaugural director of the institution. NAPA is presently engaged in the construction of a new theatre edifice to offer cutting-edge amenities for its training program. Puppet theatre in Pakistan deserves particular attention due to the inheritance of various centuries-old South Asian puppetry traditions, such as rod puppets, marionettes, and shadow puppets. In 1975, the PNCA founded the National Puppet Theatre. The Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop established a puppet company in 1978 and currently organises puppetry festivals at its headquarters in Lahore. The Alhamra Puppet Theatre was established by the Lahore Arts Council in 1986. The National College of Arts students also uphold a puppetry society.

The group known as Thespianz Theatre was established in 2005 to foster strong connections between our nation and various countries worldwide. Consequently, they deduced that the most intimate connections could only be established by engaging in cultural interactions with other countries. To achieve this, they extensively examined diverse cultures that coexisted within national, social, and geographical limits. They then compared these cultures with our own to identify the shared characteristics that existed despite their significant differences. The Thespianz Theatre delivered a series of exceptionally proficient theatrical performances. They also felt the need to work on some of the greatest classics of Urdu literature created by skilled craftsmen. They began by

staging epic classics by Khuwaja Moin-ud-din, such as *Talim-e-Balighan*⁷, *Lal Qilay say Lalo Khait Tak*⁸, *Mirza Ghalib Bundar Road per*⁹, and *Zawal-e-Hyderabad*¹⁰. They also staged well-managed and well-performed Shakespearean classics like *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. This allowed them to establish themselves as dignified and diverse theatrical performers who were both enthusiastic and dedicated. They translated and performed the works of numerous English playwrights in the national language.

The challenges and barriers they encountered in their efforts to promote theatre and performing arts propelled them towards the enhancement and expansion of cultural theatre and dance. Satirical comedies are highly favoured in our society, just as they are in Western cultures. They also began their journey by casting their actors in staging Nadeem Riaz's play *Yaro ye bhe naqli he*¹¹. This play marked Thespianz' inaugural theatrical performance and was directed by Mr. Faisal Malik, a highly skilled NAPA Graduate who serves as the Artistic Director. The second play directed by Mr. Ali Tahir was *Taleem-e-Balighan* by Naeem Tahir, featuring talented performers from *Thespianz*. The third play, *Goonga Naukar*¹², was a satirical directed by Mr. Faisal Malik, a notable graduate of NAPA, in February 2008. Thespianz is expected to have a significant influence in the coming years following these promising performances. Individuals involved in the theatre industry in Pakistan are cognisant of the current challenges it faces, as well as its inherent capacity to stimulate contemplation through traditional dramatic elements.

English drama writing and performance in Pakistan has been a lackluster affair both in terms of creativity and literary criticism.” (Zaheer, 278) Muneeza Shamsie in her latest work *Hybrid Tapestries* says, “English play by a Pakistani writer is still rare.” (517) as she presents a brief overview of the works of those playwrights who are of diasporic origin. English drama writing did not flourish in Pakistani culture for the reason pointed out by Zia Mohyeddin (as cited in Zaheer, 278) that drama flourishes in those societies where “Theatre is part and parcel of cultural milieu” (515) As an illustration, India is a country where theatre as a performing art is integral to the culture. In Pakistani culture, this is a rare case for two clear reasons. First, religious extremists view theatre as a performing art that conflicts with Islamic norms and customs. Second, there are very few theatres in Pakistan

⁷ Education for Adults

⁸ From Red Fort to Lahu Khet (A place in Karachi, Sindh)

⁹ Mirza Ghalib on Bandar Road

¹⁰ Downfall of Hyderabad

¹¹ Friends, this too is Fake.

¹² The Dumb Waiter

where drama may be staged. Writers of diasporic heritage, like Hanif Qureshi, Rukhsana Ahmad, Ayub Khan Din, and Wajahat Ali, have made substantial contributions to Pakistani Anglophone drama. Significant themes and concerns of diasporic playwrights include identity issues of the Pakistani diaspora as they deal with the liminal space by being too local for a foreign culture and too foreign for local culture.

Shah Sharabeel, a contemporary name on the canvas of Pakistani Anglophone Theatre, is one of two contemporary theatrical companies based in Pakistan's capital that have created waves in the country's performing arts. Under Centre Stage Production, he produced and directed plays such as *Moulin Rouge*, *Bombay Dreams*, and *Phantom of the Opera*. Sharabeel's contributions to the theatre are notable since he broke away from the replication and reproduction of Western plays in his theatrical creations. However, it is interesting and relevant to mention that the plays and performances are not very common and remain infrequent.

The second group is Theatre Wallay¹³. Created in 2005, the troupe focuses on social welfare themes in their theatrical performances. Their artistic director Fizza Hassan believes that due to economic conditions and changing priorities, cultural spaces cannot act as a medium to combat fear and divide. Theatre Wallay has produced plays in both Urdu and English, as well as an Urdu translation of *Waiting for Godot* titled *Godot k Intezar Mein*. Their English adaptation of *Zard Patton Ka Bann*, titled *On Common Grounds*, premiered in 2017 at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland. Both of these theatrical organisations with amateur actors have offered opportunities for young people who are bright and ready to test their ability in acting by participating in theatre.

Another significant point to mention here is that there is not a “single indigenous or diasporic Pakistani English Playwright who could win a place in the drama anthologies written and compiled in Western academia.” (Zaheer, 285) One such example is *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*, edited by Helen Gilbert. This anthology includes playwrights from Malaysia, West Indies, India, and Singapore and dramatists from many other former colonies, except Pakistan. The corpus available in the literary criticism of English drama writing in Pakistan, or South Asian drama is based on diasporic angst.

¹³ Literally translated as ‘People of Theatre’

Hence Pakistani English Drama writing is limited in creative fecundity and critical recognition.

1.1.2 Resistance, Fanaticism, Dissent and the Genesis of Political Theatre in Pakistan

“Tyranny cuts off the head that sings, but the voice at the bottom of the good returns to the secret springs of the earth and out of the darkness rises through the mouth of the people.”
(Neruda cited by Volodia 89)

Largely Pakistan has been an ethnically varied and religiously fanatical country for the past seven decades. Individuals have politicised religion to acquire control over a population that is already impoverished and deprived of adequate educational opportunities. From General Ayub Khan's first military coup in 1958 to East Pakistan's division in 1971 (now Bangladesh), to Zia's regime, and on to the present crisis of religious and ethnic hostility still jolting so-called democratic Pakistan, many have questioned whether or not Pakistan will ever achieve social and political stability. Many factors, including religious and ethnic diversity, have contributed to Pakistan's inability to overcome its sociopolitical and economic issues. A recent example of this is the decision in the blasphemy case of Asia Bibi, which has further polarised religious and political groups in Pakistan. She is a Christian woman who was recently exonerated of charges of religious blasphemy by Pakistan's highest court. Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), a hard-core Islamist political party, not only protested but also closed down the capital until a truce was reached between the government and TLP leadership. Although the perpetrators in the cases of Salman Taseer and Mashaal Khan were brought to jail, it is not just religious minorities who are struggling with such radical ideologies. “Having said that it is vital to assert that largely, Pakistani society is still religiously political and politically religious where dialogue is always shadowed by fear and threat and hence creating obstacles for the growth of a democratic and progressive society.” (Zaheer, 280)

The recent case of *Zindagi Tamasha*¹⁴, a film by Sarmad Sultan Khoosat (2019), which has been approved by both the federal and provincial censor boards but is currently on hold due to a complaint alleging that the film's content is blasphemous, highlights the sharp divide in opinion that exists in Pakistan today. The film, which tells the narrative of a struggling preacher who inflames the Islamic fundamentalist element by spewing hatred, fear, and rage in the name of religion, won recognition at the International Busan Film

¹⁴ Circus of Life

Festival. Again, TLP is at the centre of a sad situation: the government has forwarded this film to the Council on Islamic Ideology for evaluation. The situation shows how deeply the influence of religiously driven political elements has permeated Pakistani culture, leading to a suppression of free expression. The film's director and co-producer, Sarmad Sultan Khoosat, has received death threats and has written an open letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Twitter, in which he explains why he believes he is being accused of damaging the reputation of religious leaders through the film. More importantly, he pleads, "the space for reasonable and creative thought and expression must not be taken by a few malcontents for their political objectives, but I worry that this is what will happen if we bow down this time." (Sarmad, 2020). It is crucial to mention the remarks of the Munir Commission from 1953, which are still very relevant to contemporary Pakistani society regarding the tension between religion and politics. It states that the absence of understanding and disrupted working of the government has managed to bring Pakistan into a state of uncertainty, where representatives lack practical suggestions and seem woefully ignorant about intractable issues since opposing fundamentals are left to their own which can only produce anarchy and chaos (141). Pakistan would be a very different place now if its political leadership had acted in light of this interpretation of religious and political forces.

In Zia's reign, religious extremism gained speed as a consequence of his Radicalization. Moonis Ahmar quotes Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi in his article "The Dynamics of Elite Politics in Pakistan and its Nexus with Clergy and Military during Musharraf's Era" that to undermine the support of his political opponents, General Zia-ul-military Haq's dictatorship (1977-1985) lavished favours on Islamic parties and pushed orthodox and fundamentalist groups to enter politics. Jamaat-i-Islami either publicly backed General Zia-ul-Haq or had amicable relations with him until martial law was lifted (46). He tried to curb the individual and political freedom of expression by torturing, eliminating and arresting his political opponents, banning revolutionaries and progressive intellectuals like Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Habib Jalib, by smashing resistance forums of art and literature especially those that voiced women's rights. The progressive intelligentsia faced oppression in the times of Ayub Khan's dictatorship, but well-trenched battles were fought by writers like Safdar Mir, Hameed Akhtar, and I.A Rehman however, the progressive writers of Zia's era face the worst. According to Fayyaz Baqir:

Zia ul Haq declared everything opposed to his rule un-Islamic and unpatriotic. He crushed the political and social liberties of all the groups

opposed to him. A rich literature of resistance was produced during the Zia Era. Poets and writers went on self-exile, university teachers were transferred to colleges and college teachers were transferred to remote and difficult stations as a punishment for expressing their dissent against Zia's "Islamist" ideology. Secret journals, pamphlets and handouts also started circulating to vent out the anger of people harassed and tortured by military authorities. However, Zia ul Haq succeeded in creating a major divide between pro-establishment and anti-establishment intelligentsia in line with the dictates of the Cold War. (12)

Thus, the Zia regime's sociopolitical tyranny built a connection with religious elements, maintained restrictions on free speech, and ignored arts and literature. This political context energised artists from the performing arts. Dastak, a Karachi-based theatre company created in the early 1980s by Aslam Azhar and Mansoor Saeed, believed that theatre is an efficient means of reaching the masses. Asma Mundra Wala espouses "Their subjects were pertinent to the politically charged atmosphere of the time and bore relevance to their leftist ideology." (59). Dastak attracted the attention of several political workers by performing political street theatre in various areas of Karachi; its presentations were modified versions of plays by Brecht and Safdar Hashimi. Eugene Van Erven argues that Dastak was the first political theatre in Pakistan with a diverse membership, including factory workers, slum dwellers, university students, and office employees, thereby reflecting the varied strata of Pakistani society with differing levels of political awareness (103).

The rise of MQM (Muttahida Qomi Movement), which was encouraged by General Zia ul Haq to undermine the electoral reputation of Benazir Bhutto in Sindh, led to a reign of terror in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Dastak disintegrated in the 1990s as a result of the tense environment of uncertainty and threats to existence, which led to a decline in attendance and the departure of some members to pursue professions overseas. As a result of political repression and volatile socio-economic situations, a significant amount of dissent and protest ceased. As of today, MQM has lost its political and militant control in Karachi. Cultural events like as the Karachi Literary Festival and the International Theatre Festival produced by the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) have been frequently held in this decade.

Ajoka's start in Lahore and Tehreek-e-Niswan's ¹⁵origin resulted from a similar idea that theatre "is an institution that inspires much-needed change in the society by investigating societal problems and by protesting against the oppression." (Zaheer 283) These two theatre companies are pioneers of political theatre in Pakistan. They saw the need to revive life for the subjugated citizens of Pakistan and so sought to establish a new vision for resurrection, progress, and collective awareness to create a better and transformed society. In a 1996 seminar, Mda stated that theatre as a form of protest does not aim to appeal to the awareness of the oppressor; rather, it directly confronts the oppressed and mobilises people to fight against injustice. Tehreek-e-Niswan began its journey by emphasising women's rights and presenting plays by female authors. Plays such as *Dard ke Faslay* ¹⁶ and *Aurat* (Woman) portray the predicament of women in oppressive times when they must battle sexism, harassment, and the familial influence of forced marriages. As its name suggests, Tehreek-e-Niswan had a significant role in developing women with artistic and literary aptitude. On the other side, plays presented under the umbrella of Ajoka fostered discourse on vital political concerns that could not otherwise be stated. It may be considered an intervention against the imposed silence of government entities.

One such example is *The Third Knock*, in which apartment tenants murder their landlord, who then returns from the dead as the tenants celebrate their accomplishments. The landlord's reappearance three times throughout the play is a metaphor for Pakistan's repeating authoritarianism. When the government imposed severe censorship laws on the substance of art and performances, Ajoka emerged as a prominent artistic umbrella in Pakistan that continued to express the unthinkable by figuratively integrating its narrative. Ajoka continued to register its protest through performances against state-mandated tyranny, revealing the method of cultural control, and stands in stark contrast to the mainstream ideologies of extreme Islamisation.

With the inflow of financial help offered by the West during and after the Afghan war, these prominent theatre organisations began creating plays based on donor-funded themes that were following the global neoliberalism trend. During the 1990s and 2000s, NGOs initiated development initiatives in Pakistan. During this period, Ajoka and Tehreek e Niswan created *Burqavaganza*, *Akhir Kyun*¹⁷, and *Meri Zindagi ka Safar*¹⁸, respectively.

¹⁵ Urdu for 'Movement for Women', a movement based on the struggle for women's rights

¹⁶ Translates as 'Pain of Distance'

¹⁷ Translates as 'But why?'

¹⁸ Translates as 'Journey of my Life'

Burqavaganza was sponsored by the British Council, whilst *Akhir Kyun* and *Meri Zindagi ka Safar* were supported by the British Government Fund for Global Development, which was administered by the British Council. Previously mentioned Tehreek e Niswan plays like as *Akhir Kyun*, and *Meri Zindagi ka Safar* addressed forced marriages, honour killings, and mother-child health care. The stories in *Akhir Kyun* are based on actual events of the horrible crime of honour killing. In rural Sindh, where the feudal system is still prevalent, women, children, and men are punished by important persons and institutions like the police and Jirga, the local justice system.

Meri Zindagi Ka Safar, which dealt with gynaecological issues, was presented at a Symposium on Women-child health in Karachi in 2010, where the majority of the audience consisted of paramedics, and hence was unable to reach the communities that are victims of early marriage and inadequate reproductive health care. Tehreek e Niswan deviates from its basic concept as a socialist and revolutionary theatre by producing plays such as *Akhir Kyun*? which address significant social problems but are donor-driven. These NGOs commercialised activist theatre and transformed it into a source of revenue for organisations. “The essence of theatre as an instrument of social critique and artistic expression is placed at the back burner, furthermore it is the redeployment of western modernity as a way of economic development” (Zaheer, 283).

These sponsors achieve their commercialization goals, and in exchange, these theatre organisations get repute in Western metropolitan areas. According to Ibrahim’s *Transnational Migrations*, subcontinental literary works do not receive attention until they are acknowledged in the West (34). In his article, Dirlik critiques this commercialization that the comprador intellectuals of the third world are nourishing, as a result of which the independent character of their work is neglected; as Dirlik calls it “an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power” (339). This “newfound power” refers to the fact that writers such as Azr Nafisi, Leila Ahmad, Nawal al Sidhawi, and Fatima Merssini have become renowned Islamic feminists in the West by giving criticism of Islam and the role of women in Islam that aligns with Western philosophy.

Similarly, in Pakistan, financed projects of Ajoka sparked the discussion that ‘global intelligentsia’ (336) is propagating Western perspectives on Islamic doctrines and practices, particularly after September 11 when Islamophobia developed on worldwide fronts.

Burqavaganza displays the *Burqa*¹⁹ as a metaphor for oppression and how women are compelled to live between four walls and are not permitted to make decisions regarding their lives; hence, it looks to be a paradigm for an ultra-conservative culture. Despite Ajoka's opinion that the play's use of the veil as a metaphor for concealing one's true self-generated controversy due to the veil's religious connotations in Pakistani culture, Ajoka and Tehreek-e-Niswan have seen transformations in their ideology and substance from their founding years.

The ideologies of both of these groups have changed to human rights advocacy, which carries the "white man's duty" of civilizing and addressing "the wrongs of the unfit." (Spivak 524) In her article "*Righting Wrongs*," Spivak argued that "human rights culture" is driven by unrelenting Northern-ideological impetus, even when it comes from the South, and that "there is a real epistemic gap between Southern human rights activists and those they protect." (527) Spivak argues that these NGOs and social activist groups with exposure to the European transnational public spotlight are the agents tasked with advocating for the rights of the powerless and dispossessed.

Both of these theatre groups were the figureheads of dissent against subjugation and began as political theatre, but recently they have joined the bandwagon of Spivak's "native informants" (ix), who are more interested in promoting Western notions through their plays, thereby converting protest into paid advocacy. With the transition in Pakistan's socio-cultural milieu since the beginning of the 21st century, the overt political persecution endured by these two theatre companies has become a thing of the past, and the theatre of social action continues to thrive in the presence of consumerism and commercialization.

In addition to having social obligation and galvanizing collective psyche, drama and theatre that emphasises the power dynamics of sociopolitical realities are referred to as political theatre/plays. Literature and politics, according to Nagugi, are intertwined in a way that causes them to reflect and influence one another (71). Consequently, the artistic depiction of these issues through drama creates niches for discussion and debate. Essentially, theatre and drama explore realities, which in turn influence literary productions. Since Usman Ali currently resides in Pakistan.

¹⁹ The Islamic veil, often worn as a cultural cloth in South Asia

and as a literary figure, he observes the social and political conditions of Pakistani society and distil them into his works. His plays identify such pervasive concerns to foster understanding and spark a change in the mindsets of the people. Ali seeks social change; his plays are thought-provoking interventions because theatre and drama have more mobilising and awareness-raising power than any other literary or performing genre.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Ali's plays seem to depict socio-psychic and cultural subject-positions in Pakistani society and culture through the expression of grief and guilt. To understand Ali's plays in their socio-cultural background, Bakunin's notion of social anarchism, Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection, and Elisabeth Kubler Ross's theory of grief, can all be invoked as helpful theoretical models and analytical frameworks. These frameworks help establish the nuances that govern Ali's characters and lend credence to this study's focus, the dialectical relationship between guilt and anarchism, and between grief and abjection.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To investigate the subtle ways in which social anarchism is shown and integrated into the dramatic framework of Ali's plays.
- ii. To Examine how Ali uses abjection in his dramaturgy, exploring its meaning and how it is employed in the plays.
- iii. To scrutinize the themes of grief and death in the plays that Ali has chosen, paying particular attention to how the playwright has portrayed these difficult emotions and how they intricately interact with the dramatic tales.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does social anarchism seem to work in Ali's works, both in setting and in character development?
2. How does Ali layer his characters with abject themes, and for what end does he employ abjection?
3. In what manner do grief and death intersect within the dynamic framework of Ali's dramaturgy to trigger introspection within the audience?

1.5 Research Methodology

This section of the study describes the selected research design and methodology to answer the research questions of the study. To meet the requirements of research objectives, this research study has followed the approach and method of qualitative textual and thematic analysis, which are exploratory in nature. These methods are utilised to decipher a variety

of texts and their content. They also provide meaning and critique of the texts. Textual Analysis is a vital strategy in exploring behaviors, attitudes and conditions in which a particular text is produced. According to McKee:

Textual analysis is a methodology: a way of gathering and analysing information in academic research. Some academic disciplines (particularly in the physical and social sciences) are extremely rigorous about their methodologies; (...) Media Studies and Cultural Studies do not police their methodologies in this way. (1)

Belsey considers textual analysis central to research in cultural criticism, a method beneficial for understanding how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and identities make sense of their place in the world. McKee concurs, stating that analyzing texts helps researchers learn how others perceive the world, using their best judgment to predict possible meanings, as there is no single correct interpretation of any text. Belsey agrees, noting that interpretations are informed by social, cultural, and sometimes personal elements. Researchers, acting as spectators, recognize that reality is multi-dimensional and layered with various meanings. This approach provides concrete evidence and locates opinions on a topic, reinforcing the idea that reality cannot be captured by a single, absolute definition. Belsey states

This is not to say, however, that the text alone determines its reading. The vocabulary of traditional criticism is imprecise when it says, 'the text textual analysis as a research method "force" us to see this feature or that; the text "makes" us rethink our attitudes'. No text can ever compel its reader to view it in a particular way. We should do better, in my view, to adopt a critical vocabulary which allows the text to 'invite' certain readings and 'offer' specific positions to its addressee. (166 & 167)

Textual analysis extends beyond traditional interpretations to encompass both the expression of an author and the comprehension of a text within 'sense-making communities' (McKee 70). This qualitative approach explores texts within various social, cultural, psychological, religious, and political contexts, allowing insights into how texts influence and are influenced by individuals, groups, and communities in society. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative textual analysis emphasizes subjective interpretations, linking possibilities to the text's production, social context, and individual experiences. This research investigates the socio-cultural backdrops of the selected texts namely *The Odyssey*, *The Last Metaphor* and *The Guilt*. The agenda of this research study is to provide

a cultural critique of Usman Ali's dramaturgy through textual and thematic analysis, exploring themes such as class oppression, economic divide, and marginalization. This analysis is guided by research questions that frame the data analysis process, aligning with Jason A. Smith's advocacy for focusing on research objectives and questions in qualitative textual analysis in media studies (1) and Belsey's argument that textual analysis should address research queries (171). Both criticisms can be addressed when situating the analysis within a particular research question and addressing what can be seen as a reasonable interpretation (Lindlof & Bryan 25).

When working with dramatic texts, it's crucial to recognize that drama is generally intended for stage performance, unlike poetry or narrative fiction. Although some plays are written for reading, most are crafted for the stage, influencing their format. In drama, the main focus is on the interactions between characters, typically conveyed through dialogues. Other elements, such as the title, character descriptions, visual imagery, and directions for performance, serve as secondary to the primary focus on dialogue and action. Reading a primary source allows the reader to gain insight into characters' linguistic choices, speech patterns, psychology, social setting, cultural behaviors, and social roles, along with the context of its creation. This contrasts with live performances, where multimedia elements like music, sound effects, lighting, and stage props enhance the audience's experience. The playwright constructs this world through words and actions, prompting questions about how their life influences their writing. Analyzing a text is akin to exploring a new world, and textual analysis helps in understanding the content. To make a more systematic thematic analysis, the study has utilised a thematic analysis model developed by Braun and Clarke. According to them, researchers can apply either an inductive or deductive approach to this model as per their research demands. Therefore, this study has used a deductive approach under the guidance of three theoretical lenses to interpret and analyse the data. In this regard, the following six steps are followed to generate thematic discussions (see table 1):

1. Familiarization with data
2. Coding
3. Generating themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Table 1

Steps In The Generation Of Thematic Discussion:

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun, Virginia & Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Vol.3, 2006, pp. 77-101

Vieira and Queiroz also assert that qualitative content analysis is helpful in the reduction of research data, unlike other qualitative methods. In this way, a researcher focuses only on the selected aspects that are related to research. (12)

1.6 Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, primarily utilizing textual analysis to facilitate the examination, interpretation, and theoretical framing of the selected texts. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth analysis, investigation, and interpretation of the texts, thereby elucidating the cultural and socio-economic contexts that underpin them.

This method aims to reveal the motivations and rationale behind the selection of ideologies and themes, providing the freedom and space necessary for comprehensive analysis and interpretation. The study does not disregard historical contexts, as exemplified by Ali's "The Odyssey," which is interwoven with themes surrounding the war on terror, or "The Last Metaphor," which is based on a real-life incident of violence in the streets of Pakistan. "The Guilt" is dedicated to honoring the legacy of the renowned stage artist Mastana. These contextual backgrounds are essential for exploring underlying themes such as social anarchism, abjection, and grief, thereby justifying the use of textual analysis in this study. In order to provide further depth this study utilizes thematic analysis as well to explore the themes and characters in Ali's plays. As discussed previously thematic analysis as conceptualised by Braun and Clarke involves six key stages. These phases provide a structured pathway for researchers to follow, ensuring a methodical and transparent process.

1.6.1 Familiarization with the Data

The first phase involves immersing oneself in the data to become thoroughly acquainted with its content. This includes reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas, and making preliminary observations. For this study, the primary data consists of textual sources, such as literary works, academic articles, and critical essays. The researcher meticulously read and annotated these texts, ensuring a deep understanding of their content. This immersion process allowed for the identification of significant points of interest and potential areas for deeper analysis.

1.6.2 Generating Initial Codes

In the second phase, the researcher systematically codes the data. Coding involves highlighting sections of the text that appear relevant to the research questions and assigning labels (codes) to these segments. This process is crucial for organizing the data into meaningful groups. Given the deductive approach of this study, coding was guided by three theoretical lenses: social anarchism, abjection, and grief. These lenses provided a framework for identifying relevant segments of data and assigning initial codes that align with these theoretical perspectives.

For example, when analyzing texts discussing the transformative process and involvement of factors such as social and institutional oppression, codes such as state exploitation, institutional domination, and class conflict are applied under the theme of

social anarchism. Plays such as *The Odyssey* and *The Last Metaphor* are particularly examined for their depictions of social anarchism.

1.6.3 Searching for Themes

Once initial codes are generated, the next step is to search for themes. Themes represent broader patterns of meaning that emerge from the coded data. This phase involves examining the codes and collating them into potential themes. The researcher looks for relationships between codes and groups them into coherent categories. In this study, the themes are identified based on the theoretical lenses, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the established theoretical framework. Several key themes are integrated into the analysis to enrich the understanding of the data. These themes include:

1. **Social Anarchism:** This theme explores the exploitation and domination by state and institutional powers, highlighting class conflict and the struggle for survival. It examines the quest for individual freedom through the dismantling of social and institutional oppression. Plays such as *The Odyssey* and *The Last Metaphor* are explored for their representations of these themes, highlighting how characters navigate and resist oppressive structures.
2. **Abjection:** Drawing from Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, as appropriated by Imogen Tyler, this theme investigates the social dimensions of disgust, horror, psychosis, and violence. It focuses on the uncanny aspects of social existence and how these elements shape societal perceptions and behaviors. This theme is particularly examined in plays like *The Guilt*, *The Flute*, *The Breath*, and *The Prisoners*, which depict the abject through various narrative and visual strategies.
3. **Grief:** This theme incorporates Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's model of grief, examining the emotional and psychological responses to loss. It looks at how grief is experienced and expressed within different cultural contexts, and how it influences social interactions and identity formation.

1.6.4 Reviewing Themes

The fourth phase involves reviewing the identified themes to ensure they accurately represent the data. This involves two levels of review: the first level involves checking the themes against the coded data extracts to ensure coherence, while the second level involves considering the themes in relation to the entire data set. This iterative process may result in some themes being refined, combined, or discarded. The researcher ensures

that each theme is distinct and provides a meaningful contribution to the overall analysis. For this study, reviewing themes also included cross-referencing with theoretical perspectives to ensure alignment and relevance.

1.6.5 Defining and Naming Themes

In this phase, the researcher refines each theme, defining its essence and determining the specific aspects of the data it captures. Clear definitions and names are assigned to each theme, which aids in providing a coherent narrative for the final analysis. For instance, a theme like state exploitation and domination might capture the dynamics of state control and the fight for individual autonomy, supported by textual evidence and theoretical insights.

1.6.6 Producing the Report

The final phase involves weaving together the themes into a cohesive narrative that answers the research questions and provides insights into the study's objectives. This report not only describes the themes but also illustrates how they interconnect and contribute to a deeper understanding of the research topic. The analysis is presented in a structured manner, with each theme discussed in detail, supported by relevant textual extracts and theoretical interpretations.

1.7 Application to the Study

By employing a deductive approach guided by the themes of social anarchism, abjection, and grief, this study systematically applies Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis model to interpret and analyze the data. The theoretical lenses provide a structured framework, ensuring that the analysis remains focused and coherent.

The themes identified in this study offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between social and institutional forces, emotional responses to loss, and the darker aspects of human psychology. For example, the theme of social anarchism addresses the exploitation and domination by state and institutional powers, highlighting class conflict and the struggle for survival. This theme also explores the quest for individual freedom through the dismantling of social and institutional oppression. Plays such as *The Odyssey* and *The Last Metaphor* are examined for their depictions of social anarchism, highlighting how characters navigate and resist oppressive structures.

The theme of abjection, drawing from Julia Kristeva and appropriated by Imogen

Tyler, delves into the social dimensions of disgust, horror, psychosis, and violence, focusing on the uncanny aspects of social existence. This theme is particularly relevant in understanding how societal norms and behaviors are shaped by underlying psychological factors. Plays like *The Guilt*, *The Flute*, *The Breath*, and *The Prisoners* are analyzed for their representations of abjection, using various narrative and visual strategies to depict the abject.

Grief, as examined through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's model, provides insights into the emotional and psychological responses to loss, and how grief is experienced and expressed within different cultural contexts. This theme helps to illuminate the personal and collective impact of loss on social identities and interactions.

In conclusion, the use of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis model and Belsey's textual analysis, combined with a deductive approach and guided by the themes of social anarchism, abjection, and grief, provides a robust framework for conducting qualitative research. This study's systematic analysis offers valuable insights into the complexities of diasporic identities, contributing to the broader field of cultural studies and qualitative research methodologies.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This research study is an attempt to explore social anarchism and the idea of abjection through the expression of grief and guilt in Usman Ali's plays. Therefore, it employs the theoretical framework of anarchism given by Bakunin and the theory of abjection proposed by Kristeva. The supporting lens to conduct this research is the Theory of Grief by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

The motivation behind triangulating these theoretical models is to investigate their relationship by exploring one as a consequence of another. This aim can only be achieved by exploring and providing a comprehensive analysis of characters, scenes and dialogues in Ali's plays. Abjection, grief, guilt and anarchism are interrelated phenomena in the social life of a commoner. At the basic level when, social, cultural, economic, and political exploitations are added to the system, it gives rise to grief, and segregation (abjection) of a commoner from the mainstream, leading to 'guilt'. At this stage, a commoner experiences guilt in accepting the low-social and cultural morals and setting low standards for politics and economy. This psychotic condition motivates public to reject state and its idea into a system that accepts anarchy. It is the stage where people want social freedom, independence in social matters, personal dignity and identity. Goldstone has quoted five elements that

create an unstable social equilibrium: economic or fiscal strain, alienation and opposition among the elites, widespread popular anger at injustice, a persuasive shared narrative of resistance, and favourable international relations. (13-14)

While commenting on the fact that how revolutionary expression is set in the literature, William Miller says that a writer cannot write about tragedies of people if he is afraid to question everything, be it any institution, habit or custom. (63) It is how tragedies are written; they preach revolution based upon the truth of self-realisation. The individual is only true star who may survive if others (state, society or culture) do not attack on his freedom and dignity. However, if the reverse happens then he must be prepared for reaction from the state and the society. According to Haedicke as cited by Koppers “an activist form of dramaturgy aims to influence and alter the actual world, not just reflect it.” (8) Therefore, drama and theatre as performing arts are vital in stimulating and generating thinking processes and in making audience to be critical of the world around them.

1.8.1 Bakunin’s Idea of Anarchism

Mikhail Bakunin was a Russian revolutionary figure and a key thinker who laid the foundations for the idea of anarchism. He advocates the idea of ‘resistance’ against power and state, indirectly targets unequal power distribution, class distinctions and weak social structures. His idea of anarchism is tri-dimensional in nature which includes, class, state and bourgeois democracy. Bakunin in his notable work *Statism and Anarchy* (1873) presents the notion of two binaries in terms of social classes. One is the oppressed class which consists of labourers and ordinary people. This class has potential for revolt but the individuals belonging to this category are not conscious of themselves as a class. The other is the oppressor class that is relatively smaller in number, yet this class has an organised way of controlling the masses. He argues that the social consciousness in society can happen on the basis of three conditions: an extreme hatred of general public for their down-trodden conditions, the faith that society can transform, and this transformation is a vivid alternative, and finally, a transformed society in which complete human freedom and liberty become possible. He is of the view that the state oppresses people through its institutions like police and bureaucracy because the state “stands outside the people and above them”. (136). He asserts that:

A voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations would put an end to all masters and domination of any kind, while also allowing for the free construction of popular life in accordance with

popular needs. This would be accomplished not from above downward, as in the state, but rather from below upward, by the people themselves, eliminating the need for any governments or parliaments. (Bakunin 136)

Hence, Bakunin idealises for a social setup where people can enjoy equal rights and a radical democracy without controlling mindsets. Mikhail Bakunin recognized that ideas alone have limitations in their ability to inspire. Their resonance depends on their alignment with existing instincts. When an idea strikes a chord within us, it becomes more than mere theory—it becomes a force for action. Bakunin’s insight reminds us that true inspiration lies not only in abstract concepts but also in the primal urges and passions that drive us to resist and to create change. For Bakunin, inspiration transcends mere intellectual concepts. It’s not enough for an idea to exist in theory; it must ignite something within us. The true power of an idea lies in its ability to connect with our emotional and instinctual core. (14-15)

The researcher has invoked Bakunin’s idea of social anarchism as presented in *Statism and Anarchy (1873)* to study Usman Ali’s plays and to highlight textual instances where the writer dramatizes the condition of oppressed communities and their anger, dissent and individual struggles against their socio-economic marginalisation. Bakunin’s purview is used to highlight the quest for individual freedom that lies at the heart of self-emancipation and leads to transformation at a metaphysical level.

1.8.2 Idea of Abjection by Kristeva

The idea of Abjection is another theoretical lens that guides this study to analyse the selected texts. The term ‘abjection’, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means ‘downcast and degraded’. Creed (1993) has further elaborated on the idea of abjection as:

(it is) where meaning dissolves and ‘I’ no longer exists is the abject, the place where I, is rejected. The abject poses a direct threat to the well-being of the living body, so it must be forcibly removed from that location by means of physical expulsion and mental relocation to the opposite side of an arbitrary line that serves as a barrier between the self and the other. (Kristeva 65)

There are multiple works available in the field of psychology and literature to define and bring clarity in the idea of abjection. However, among all, Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* is the most notable and commendable work, originally presented in 1980 but translated in 1982. In this body of work, she has explored multiple dimensions and perspectives through which abjection can be observed, seen, and

manifested in real life. For this purpose, a variety of analogies are drawn to make this abstract idea a more concrete conceptualization.

An abject has no position or place in society, hence it is considered as the other. Tyler, in her book *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (2013) has adopted the idea of abjection by borrowing Kristeva's idea and placing it in socio-cultural context. She examines the journey of those individuals who are cast outlike migrants, asylum seekers and travellers in Britain. When it comes to marginality, social exclusion, and injustice, Tyler argues that representational forms play a significant role.

The motivation behind using the idea of abject is the character design of the writer. He introduced characters who are social outcasts. Abjection is explored as "otherness" and a state of limbo where the characters have to break free in order to realise their true potential.

1.8.3 Theory of Grief by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Grief, sadness, hopelessness and depression are common emotions prevalent in societies where individuals are facing extreme polarization due to religion and culture. To investigate grief and guilt as the consequences and repercussions of social anarchism in society and abjection of individuals, the researcher has applied Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Theory of Grief (1969) as another supporting lens to analyse the text.

Grief is a sense of loss and the human emotional condition after losing something precious. Grief is a person's response to a loss, and it has socio-psychic, cognitive and behavioural implications. Erich Lindeman's framework of Grief presented in 1944 is vital as he argues that grief has physiological as well as emotional impact. Later, Parkes and Bowlby in their theory Bereavement and theory of Attachment and Loss respectively. endorsed these findings of Lindeman. His concept of grief is widely used in literary criticism for textual analysis nowadays.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has further refined the concept of grief (1969) into five stages of grief: namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages create a framework that develops our ability to cope with the loss of a loved one. The stage of denial is more like a shock and people take time to process the trauma and loss, which is followed by anger defined by resentment, doubt, or anger toward God or the world. The next phase, bargaining, is characterised by a desire to compensate the situation "making a deal" with God/world, typically in exchange for a changed way of life. At this point, one

may be experiencing feelings of regret and guilt, as well as a wish to change the past. Moreover, if the person grieving is not able to overcome it, it may lead to extreme form of sadness, grief i.e. depression. It can be collective or individual grief. When grief is consciously realised by the individual or collectively by the society, it is then accepted. This very last stage is crucial as it results into 'guilt' that can be understood as 'process of self-realisation' or self-awareness'. It is contended that guilt is a strong psychic condition that it may give rise to an evolution if collective, or a change when sensed at the individual level.

In Ali's plays the theme of grief and guilt are prevalent in the discourses of characters. Ali's dramaturgy is an attempt to shape catharsis in the form of grief and arises guilt among the readers so that after coming to terms with their own mortality, people are in a better position to prepare for a change, such as wrapping up any unfinished business they may feel they have. The analysis focuses on Ali's depiction of depression, and how he wanted to create acceptance of reality among the readers. In much broader sense, it helps the researcher in exploring Ali's grief as an artist and creative writer for the loss of theatrical traditions and social norms.

1.9 Chapter Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter 3: Social anarchism as a major thematic concern in Ali's plays

Chapter 4: Abjection and its role in Ali's dramaturgy

Chapter 5: Representation of grief and death in Ali's plays

Chapter 6: Conclusion

1.10 Significance of the Study

This dissertation has adopted social lenses of anarchism and abjection in literary studies which are largely explored from political and psychoanalytical facets. The significance of this study lies in the fact that drama and theatre in English before Ali is largely either diasporic or draws its content from the global north as we have seen in the cases of Ajoka, Tehreek-e-Niswan and National Academy of Performing Arts (see section 1.1.1). The history and tradition of Pakistani Anglophone Drama have been researched and presented by Muneeza Shamsi in *Hybrid Tapestries* and she is of the view that Anglophone drama

tradition in Pakistan has drawn its impetus from colonial masters (529). Therefore, the production of drama as creative form of writing remains a grey area for indigenous playwrights writing in English. This dissertation is significant in providing a detailed account of cultural impact and influence of conditions on Ali's writings as an indigenous Pakistani Anglophone dramatist. It also provides a substantial literary criticism of contemporary English Drama in Pakistan. Since this study largely is a novel contribution in Pakistani theatre and drama, it also provides in-depth analysis of Bakunin's theorisation of anarchism and Kristeva's idea of abjection which are lesser used lenses from literary studies perspective. Written drama when translated into performance is termed as theatre. Ali's plays have been performed in academic spaces like universities and colleges of Pakistan. Therefore, terms of drama and theatre both are employed in this study. Usman Ali draws inspiration from Greek tradition by naming his characters from Greek drama, making his work global but keeping his plots rooted in Pakistani settings and culture. This makes his dramaturgy indigenous with links to the global art forms. When considered in a larger perspective, this study also seeks to motivate readers from literary and research communities to actively investigate the theories and literary foundations, especially as they relate to Pakistani theatre and drama growth. Overall, class conflict, power dynamics, hierarchical structures, and the marginalised forms of life common in some groups are some of the topics that this research addresses in Pakistani society, offering a unique method to addressing individual and communal concerns.

Ali's dramatic style acts as a contemplative prism for society's underprivileged groups. He aims to spark social consciousness by eloquently illustrating their socio-political and economic reality and elevating voices of discontent and anger. Despite this, there have not been many scholarly studies that attempt to promote or analyse his works up to now. His stories, which are deftly interwoven with the lives of his characters, bear witness to this fact. As such, the researcher believes that more investigation of these components and themes recurring in Usman Ali's plays is essential.

Ali has masterfully captured themes of protest and resistance by transforming the streets of Pakistan into theatrical miniatures. This study emphasises how critical it is to establish a research platform in order to give voice to his concerns about the state of theatre and its practitioners. As a playwright, his protest highlights the importance of moral and social ideals that never fade in the face of rapid and turbulent societal change. His dramatic performances and dramaturgy translate from text to stage, movingly embodying the silent laments of a creative artist bereaved of theatre and its performances.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“History is not the past: it is a consciousness of the past used for present purposes.”

(Greg Denning 72)

As previously indicated, there is no comprehensive critical work accessible regarding Ali's plays and his theatre, except from a few sporadic remarks. On the other hand, there is a wealth of literature concerning the themes of anarchism and subjection in various theatrical traditions. A wide variety of publications on anarchism as a political philosophy and its social implications in other cultures and communities are also accessible. However, as Julia Kristeva points out, abjection is a psychoanalytic idea. Examining relevant key corpora would be essential to distinguish the many study axes that this project is pursuing.

These include novels and scholarly papers about the themes of anarchy and abjection in literature and how they relate to theatre and theatre in a postcolonial setting in particular. In my field of study, which links significant notions of anarchism and abjection with theatre and drama in general as well as with Pakistani Anglophone play, a researcher has to draw attention to gaps in the critical research that is currently available. An overview of the literature on anarchism and subjection in literary works, as well as its applicability to theatre and theatre in the postcolonial setting, particularly in the subcontinent, may be found in books and research papers. The majority of this literature evaluation is topical in character. In this chapter, I include relevant secondary materials in the discussions I have under the different themes.

There are a variety of available materials, including books and research papers, on anarchism and subjection in literary works and their applicability to theatre and theatre in

the postcolonial setting, particularly in the subcontinent. I have divided this chapter into three parts. The first part discusses the objectives of literature review. The second part is about analysis of secondary sources. This helps in developing an understanding of the researcher's area of enquiry and to identify areas of prior scholarship. The last part is the conclusion in which I relate the secondary sources with my research area and topic.

As an emerging Pakistani Anglophone playwright, not much literary and theatre criticism is available on Usman Ali's work. As such, I have assembled secondary sources about the political theory of anarchism and its various forms, along with conversations about Abjection in social settings, with the intention of making links with theatre and drama as means of catharsis and healing – symbolic anchors to the essence of life for common people. These sources accomplish three goals for my investigation: they provide background for my findings, point out gaps in the existing critical discourse, and highlight literary study in the dramatic genre—a field that is frequently disregarded in the Pakistani Anglophone creative community.

The researcher has divided the literature review into three sections for ease and clarity so that the review proceeds systematically with a clear vision. The researcher has reviewed the books and research articles that fall in the following categories.

- I. A Background on Anarchism and Its Types
- II. Critical Scholarship about Anarchism
 - 2.2.1 Anarchism and Literary Writings
- III. Resistance in Postcolonial Drama and Theatre
 - 2.3.1 South Asian Theatre and Resistance/Protest
- IV. Literary Dimensions of Abjection/Social Abjection
- V. Drama and Theatre: Grief of the Writers, Guilt of the Audiences/ Readers

2.1 A Background of Anarchism and Its Types

The word anarchy has its origin in Greek language, and it is extracted from the word *anarchia* that means 'without a leader'. According to Peter Kropotkin, in *Encyclopedia of Britannica*, Anarchism is:

Harmony in a society is obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. (914)

Gordon in his book *Anarchy Alive: Anti-Authoritarian Politics From Practice to*

Theory states that the current reemergence of anarchism globally deserves serious consideration by students of ideology. Anarchism is now the primary reference point for significant activist networks, and it constitutes a developed, multifaceted genre of political expression. His work provides a synchronic and diachronic examination of modern anarchist ideology based on participant research. It was founded on substantial participant study on large-scale ideological manifestations in anarchist movement networks. He outlined three major conceptual clusters that comprise the stable intellectual core of current anarchism.

- a) The development of the concept of 'domination,' as well as active resistance to all kinds and systems of it,
- b) The ethos of direct acts as a major method of political activity, both constructive and destructive, and
- c) The open-ended, experimental approach, which encourages epistemic diversity, is firmly rooted in the present tense and lends support to revolutionary aspirations.

These three elements can be seen as an ideological and network convergence between ecological, feminist, antiwar, and anti-neoliberal movements. These points relate with multi-issue politics and grassroots politics at the local level. The resurgence of anarchism emphasises the continuity of movement networks, political culture, and ideological articulation, as well as crucial events in the life cycles of ideological formations. Anarcho-Communism is the notion that labour products should be cooperatively owned and distributed based on from each according to his capacity to each according to his needs. Kropotkin, Malatesta, Berkman, and Rocker all claimed to be communist anarchists. They rejected the epithet 'collectivist,'; they do not see themselves as having a more extreme vision encompassing the ultimate abolition and destruction of the wage- and price system. The bulk of revolutionary anarchist movements were used in communist economic precepts. Anarchist communes in Spain during the Civil War is one example.

Anarcho-Syndicalism is a school of thought within anarchism that focuses on the problem of labour. It contends that trade unions, as the ultimate representations of the working class, should be the basic unit of social reform. Although there is much overlap between syndicalist and communist versions of anarchism, historically, anarcho-syndicalism is intimately associated with the French syndicalist movement (i.e., the movement was a trade unionist at the end of the nineteenth century). Because anarcho-syndicalists prioritize workers' control over the economy and means of production, their

adherents are less libertarian. Walter remarked that it was not surprising that anarchists are people whose basic principle is to reject authority and should be inclined to perpetual discord (Walter 172). Based on the above passage, however, there are some general points.

- Anarchists are united in their fundamental antagonism to the state and its institutions.
- They do not oppose the concept of social order or organisation in general.
- Don't always think of freedom, especially individual freedom, as the primary objective or aim of social progress.
- Don't make any predictions about society's future.

This perception does not mean ignoring the tensions and contradictions inherent in anarchist theory. On the one hand, they are the spiritual successors of all Utopian, millenarian religious sects that believed at the end of the world and hoped that "the trumpets will ring, and we will be changed in the blink of an eye. [...] They are, nevertheless, the offspring of the Age of Reason [...] these folks are firm believers in logic, progress, and nonviolent persuasion. Anarchism is a religious conviction as well as a rational philosophy." (Joll x). As the author pointed out, these conflicts make anarchist traditions so intriguing and rich in intellectual ideas. Understanding and overcoming these contradictions is key to learning about anarchist educational principles.

Anarchism holds the rejection of authority as its main tenet. In their paper "Anarchism and non-Domination" Kinna and Prichard used republican tropes like non-domination and tyranny to illustrate the conservative constraints and limitations of the contemporary neo-Roman republican rejuvenation. Anarchists think that the contemporary nation-state and the system of private property are opposed to freedom. They serve as structural constraints to freedom rather than tools to realize it. After re-examining the causes underlying this critique, they gave two arguments. The first one states that commitment to the state or private property as an unjustified positive moral/ethical commitment skews modern republicans' negative conception of liberty. Because of its earlier moral commitment to the state, Neo-Roman republicanism is inherently conservative. Anarchist ideas of freedom as non-domination go beyond what the present republican resurgence permits, bringing up new avenues for constitutional and institutional innovation while remaining true to the essential republican normative virtue of non-domination.

Springer describes how anarchy and geography share a long and complex history in his article titled as *Anarchism and Geography: A Brief Genealogy of Anarchist Geographies*. It is characterised by high peaks of intense intellectual engagement and low

levels of ambivalence or disregard. This study examined the history of anarchist geographies from the Enlightenment's modernisation of anarchism as a political philosophy. Elise Reclus, Peter Kropotkin and others were responsible for the initial rise in geographers' engagements with anarchism at the end 19th century. They developed an emancipatory vision of geography despite the discipline's fascination with imperialism. Anarchist geographies reached their lowest point during the war years and subsequent quantitative revolution in geography. Geographic thought was not abandoned completely, and the counterculture movement in the 1970s led to radical geography. This included anarchist ideas. Another low was reached during the neoliberal boom of the 1980s and 1990s. But as hope springs eternal, anarchist geographies have become more popularised since the anti-globalisation movement began, and DIY (Do-it-yourself) culture has continued to grow. The researcher reviewed the literature to highlight the immense potential of anarchist geographies to inform geographic theories and, more importantly, inspire more practice-based imperatives. This reflects the 'freedom' of geography and its potential to break down its disciplinary boundaries.

According to Bookchin, anarchism is a highly ecumenical corpus of anti-authoritarian views. It is a conflict between two essentially opposing inclinations. One is a personalistic dedication to individual autonomy. The other is a shared commitment to social liberty. These inclinations are difficult to reconcile throughout the history of libertarian ideology. For the last century, they coexisted in anarchism as a minimum credo against the State rather than a maximalist ideology that envisioned a new society. This is not to say that distinct schools of anarchism did not promote specific kinds of social structure, even though they were frequently at odds with one another. Anarchism mainly emphasised what Isaiah Berlin referred to as "negative liberty," or "formal freedom from" rather than substantive freedom.

Anarchism hailed its commitments to negative freedom as evidence of its plurality, ideological tolerance, or innovation rather than its incoherence, as many late postmodernist celebrators have observed. The failure of anarchism to overcome this contradiction, explain the connection between the individual and the collective, or establish the historical circumstances that would allow for a stateless anarchic society has resulted in unsolved difficulties in anarchist theory. Pierre Joseph Proudhon was a more outspoken anarchist than most of his contemporaries. He wanted to paint a vision of a libertarian community. Contracts between small producers, cooperatives, and communes were central to Proudhon's vision of a free society. It reminded him of the provincial craft world where he

was born. Proudhon's effort to reconcile a patronised and patriarchal notion of liberty with contractual social structures fell short. The connection between the artisan, cooperative, and commune was founded on bourgeois principles of fairness and equality rather than communist principles. This represented the artisan's inclination for autonomy while removing any moral commitment to the group other than good intentions.

Williams in his article 'Taming all Challengers: Academically and Philosophically Situating Anarchist-Sociology in North America', stated that anarchism has had a negligible formal impact on the discipline of sociology. Anarchism's low presence in sociology may have been due to the limitations, the nature and purposeful exclusion of anarchist voices, and the nature of academia and other scholarly disciplines. Many other ideologies and traditions have also developed within the discipline, including public, critical, humanist and liberation sociologies. Each one is examined for its compatibility with anarchism. The broad outline of anarchist-sociology is sketched out, with particular attention to questions of purpose, scope, and practice.

Rusche, who coined liberal peace building in 'Imagining Peace Outside of Liberal State building: Anarchist Theory as Pathway to Emancipatory Peace facilitation', has proven it to be counterproductive in its goal of fostering peace after conflict. State-building has been the dominant component of this effort. Anarchist theory is utilised to provide a fresh theoretical perspective on international relations. This enables the development of peaceful alternatives to the liberal paradigm while avoiding allegations of imperialism. Anarchism has the potential to foster an emancipatory peace practice based on direct action and prefigurative politics. Through radical forms of self-determination, it will also enhance autonomy, decentralisation, and horizontality while challenging any structural forms of dominance.

According to Fiala, Anarchism is a political ideology that denies the rationale for authority and power. As stated in his online article titled "Anarchism" he espouses that anarchism is frequently founded on moral assertions about individual liberty and liberation from oppression. Anarchists advocate a positive ideology of human flourishing based on equality, community, and non-coercive agreement. Anarchism has sparked different types of direct action, such as utopian communities, revolutionary and radical political agendas, and others. While philosophical Anarchism presents a skeptical conception of political legitimacy, Anarchism has also been used in philosophical and literary theory to represent a type of anti-foundationalism. Philosophical Anarchism can refer to either a political

ideology that rejects attempts to legitimise the state's power or a philosophical system that opposes the statement of strong grounds for knowing.

Anarchism as political philosophy as given by Bakunin and Kropotkin has massive potential. Bakunin was critical of abstract ideas, especially those regarding humanity and human societies. Bakunin understood that oppression and dominance within the material world were often achieved through abstract principles considered higher than humanity. Like his contemporary anarchists, Bakunin understood that the only way to force human action to conform to abstract principles was for people to suppress their spontaneous and voluntary associations. Bakunin understood that the imposition of abstract ideas on human behaviour was a constraint. Abstractions were created as expressions of interests, leading to domination. He recognised that abstractions were rooted within traditional power sources like a god and the state. He further criticised science's use as an analytical tool for understanding the material world. Bakunin stressed that human interaction is only possible through spontaneity. Bakunin believed that spontaneity could not be predicted or consolidated into scientific formulas. Science was based on human thought and could, therefore, only understand general ideas, not the variety and unpredictability that reality presents. Bakunin recognized this scientific flaw and argued that it was better to allow people to live their lives naturally than to have them controlled by scientific theories. It was impossible to guide science's actions without overlooking its flaws and thus threatening life with theoretical authority. He wrote, "Only life can create real things since science does not create anything; it recognises and establishes the creations of living things." (Bakunin 55).

Bakunin believed that the true development force of human life was the material reality of human existence, including its variety, spontaneity, and aspirations. Science is not the creator of anything. Bakunin's criticism of science as an abstraction reflects his belief in human freedom and spontaneity; freedom was in the free and unrestricted decision-making authority that individuals had over their lives. This power came directly from their consciousness. Bakunin believed that humans could only make their own decisions and not be coerced. Bakunin holds the view that freedom was dependent upon individual initiative. This could be either developed by an individual's consciousness or freely accepted by them. Bakunin believed that freedom and liberty were at risk from any restrictions, which could lead to a hostile environment for domination. Bakunin was aware of the dangers associated with ideology, but he also straddled that division between "big A" and the "little A" anarchists, as outlined above. Bakunin's work is highly identifiable for its post-ideological

flavour. Bakunin was also determined to create an international movement that would challenge the state-directed bourgeois order. Bakunin's contribution to contemporary anarchist activists is crucial. He saw the destruction of the old order as a catalyst for creative processes of direct democracy, free initiative, and new free societies. Bakunin gives us a glimpse into how we can strengthen our post-ideological social movement by using theory and not jettisoning the old order

Bakunin's insights are not meant to be a threat to our anti-authoritarian social movement but rather to help us clarify our struggles and identify our enemies. Bakunin can be read by contemporary anarchist activists to help them understand what is at stake when they struggle to overcome the obstacles and when they engage in theorising, which stifles revolutionary work. Bakunin's participation is part of a bigger initiative that acknowledges the continuity of anarchism as a body and activity. We often hear about the inconsistency and diversity of anarchism. It is evident that this is the case, and I don't want to deny it. It is important to emphasise the consistent anarchist activity of those who self-identify as anarchists, especially in relation to libertarian socialist projects, since these have been the most prominent in the history of anarchist activities. This is not a project to reify the past, in which we must apply or implement classic anarchist ideas into our current movements. It's to celebrate anarchism's rich and vibrant past, one that has suffered from sectarianism but also contains the hallmarks of diversity. This history holds the promise of a world without exploitation and domination. The purpose of exploring the continuity of classical anarchist thought was not to give in to the authority but to reflect on our past struggles, identify our mistakes, and ultimately learn from our complicated history. We must first understand our history to understand who we are.

Political anarchists are concerned with the state and oppose monopolistic, centralized coercive authority. Anarchists oppose the "state." Bakunin provides a historical example to demonstrate this point: "There must be supremacy of one class if there is a state, and so slavery. It is hard to envisage a state without slavery, which is why we are the state's opponents" (Bakunin 178). Kropotkin exposed the flaws in feudalism and capitalism's economic systems. They foster poverty and fake scarcity while promoting luxury. Instead, he advocated for a more decentralised economic structure based on mutual aid, mutual support, and voluntary participation. He stated that inclinations toward this form of structure already exist in evolution and human civilisation. Kropotkin was not a fan of Marxist critiques of capitalism. He disagreed with the labour theory in part, believing that

there was no necessity to link work accomplished and commodity values. Kropotkin's attack on wage labour was focused more on employers' authority over workers than on obtaining surplus value from their labour. Kropotkin maintained that this power was attainable because private ownership of a productive resource was safeguarded by the state. Kropotkin argued that excess value was the issue. He believed that if employees in a specific industry kept the surplus for themselves and did not transfer it to the public interest, society would remain unfair. Shantz referred to anarchism as rejecting the state, a despotic institution that must be dissolved for human nature and creativity to flourish. (5)

However, this does not mean that there is no social order. Anarchism has a positive vision for the type of community it expects to emerge if political authority is removed. Anarchism shared liberalism's belief in individual autonomy and Marxism's belief in social justice. However, it claimed it could implement these principles more effectively and efficiently without the use of the state. Anarchism, a secular political philosophy, was born out of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Anarchist thought was the result of many different people in different countries who developed its core principles. This study explored the opinions of several anarchist thinkers, including Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michel Bakunin. It also examined the relationship between anarchism and terrorism.

2.2 Critical Scholarship about Anarchism

May stated in *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* that the French poststructuralists' political writings have been unable to be articulated in the larger framework of political philosophy. This is primarily due to the pervasive tendency of politics to be defined by a single parameter, the balance between individual rights and state power in liberalism, and the emphasis on economic justice in Marxism. Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze offered a tactical political philosophy. It emphasised that power comes from many sources and operates on many different registers. This idea is rooted in traditional anarchist thought. It sees the political and social field as a complex network of intertwined practices with overlapping political effects. Poststructuralist anarchism rejects two problematic assumptions about anarchism: that humans have an (essentially benign) essence and that power is never productive but always repressive. Todd May demonstrated what an anarchist tactical political philosophy looks like when stripped of its humanist commitments, namely, a poststructuralist. The book ended with a defense, contra Habermas and Critical Theory of poststructuralist political thinking as having a met ethical framework that allows for positive ethical engagements.

Sandra Schubert described Foucault's theory of power and subjectification and extended them through the concept of 'freedom and critique' in 'Freedom as Critique: Foucault Beyond Anarchism'. Freedom can be defined by the ability to critically reflect on one's subjectification, and the conditions for that critical capacity lie within political and social institutions. This concept was developed through a critique of Foucault's standard interpretation of the objection that Foucault's thinking obscures freedom. Foucault's later works (especially *The Subject and Power*) are interpreted as solutions to the problem. This is incorrect because it confuses the different notions of freedom in Foucault's works. It breaks with the partially anarchist foundations of Foucault's scholarship. Freedom as critique is not given, but itself is subjectification. Therefore, institutionalisation is necessary. This method helped clarify Foucault's views on freedom in post foundationalism democratic theory and the social-philosophical debate about freedom.

El-Ojeili argued in his article "Anarchism as the Contemporary Spirit of Anti-Capitalism?" that there had been substantial literature on anarchism in the last decade. It is often linked to newer movements associated with alternative globalisation or postmodern theoretical currents. These books are of great interest to those who work in social and political theories, globalization studies and social movements. Ojeili examines the arguments for anarchism's revival and traces the main lines of historical anarchism. Then, he explores the similarities between anarchism, alternative globalisation movements, and, more recently, contemporary theoretical issues. This reconfigured anarchism addresses some of the postmodern excesses in the literature and the too-sharp divide between Marxism/anarchism.

Pernicone stated in *Italian Anarchism* that historians often depict Italian anarchism as a marginal social movement, doomed to succumb to its ideological contradictions following the modernization and integration of Italian society. Nunzio Pernicone challenges these traditional interpretations. Pernicone offers a sensitive but critical analysis of Italian anarchism. It traces the movement's rise, transformation, and eventual decline from 1864-1892. Based on original archival research, his book shows that the anarchists were fascinating revolutionaries who played a significant role in the Italian Socialist Left through the nineteenth century and beyond.

DeLeon's *Testimony* is a testament to auto ethnography's expanding literature and his connections to systemic and direct racism. His writing is a therapeutic way to look at his past through the ancient art of telling, testifying and developing knowledge via narrative

inquiry. Participating in an inflammatory form of scholarship, Testimony provided new perspectives on the world. Indigenous scholars believe stories are essential to communicating who we are. He explored the idea of the "middle ground" and the identities created by complex power relationships through his own experiences. Go-betweens, like border literature, may move between worlds and live in the circumstances fraught with alienation and discovery, transmission, collaboration, and cooperation. He proposed using anarchist ideology to inform greater auto ethnographic writing. This would inspire radicals and urge them to employ narrative inquiry and praxis that incorporates self-exploration in their communities. This enables them to speculate from their positions. It may be challenging, with periods of intense anguish, embarrassment, or success, as well as the frequently harsh feelings that life can bring.

In "Utopianism and Anarchism" Honeywell challenged the notion that romantic political and social thought traditions have lost any relevance or contribution to contemporary thinking. Anarchist writers continue to exploit utopian themes to maintain anarchism's strong connections to utopianism. They also convey important ideological principles, such as the significance of focusing on altering one's existing surroundings and circumstances.

Franks in his "Between Anarchism and Marxism" investigated the development of the Marxism/Anarchism schism. He investigated these seemingly disparate ideas using two independent methodologies. The first is based on analytic political theory. The other is a conceptual approach adapted from Michael Frieden. The first saw the divide between Marxism and anarchism as a sharp cut in universal principles. This account contains flaws. This study employed an alternative conceptual approach to claim that the "short twentieth century" rift between Marxism and Marxism was principally due to the prominence of Marxism given the Leninist central structure following the Bolshevik revolution. Other socialist structures were expelled and marginalised as the revolutionary party enforced a tighter interpretation of socialist ideas. New constellations of Marxism have actively engaged with anarchism since the fall of Leninist structures.

Choat in *Marxism and Anarchism in an Age of Neoliberal Crisis* calls into question assertions of an anarchist shift. This essay argues that demands for a "left convergence" of anarchism and Marxism should be treated with scepticism. It aimed to distinguish between Marxism and anarchism, arguing that the former has stronger resources to oppose neoliberalism's present dominance. It addressed three frequent anarchist objections to

Marxism: authoritarianism, economic reductionism, and a lack of moral or ethical orientation. It was suggested that each of these objections unwittingly underlined the benefits of Marxism over anarchism.

According to Hodges in 'Bakunin's Controversy with Marx: An Analysis of the Tensions within Modern Socialism' talks about Bakunin's conflict with Marx over the topic of politicism (or whether the proletariat should be active in politics) was sociologically significant since it challenged Marxian claims to represent wage workers' interests for the first time. Marx grouped all capital workers into a single class, rendering the term "proletariat" virtually as abstract as the bourgeois concept of "people." Bakunin predicted the division of the proletariat into two antagonistic classes, analogous to the division of the people (or third estate) into bourgeoisie and proletariat. Bakunin's successors were able to investigate Marx's idea of the proletariat and criticise Marx's conviction in the possibility of a future classless society. Bakunin's political dispute with Marx was over the question of politicism. Bakunin wrote that "it is this point which mainly divided the Socialists, revolutionary collectivists and the authoritarian Communists." This statement also agreed with Engels' account.

Both Marx and Bakunin recognised that their differences weren't purely strategic but theoretical. Despite their same ideals, they were also split by a class problem. Bakunin labelled Marx and his followers bourgeois socialists, a revolutionary who believed that political revolution must come before the social and economic revolution. Bakunin also considered supporters of proletariat state dictatorships. They would be known as bureaucrats and replace capitalism with a government of social scientists. Bakunin wrote about political leaders in the proletariat, "obeying this iron law, according to which the social situation of a given individual outweighs, as a determining factor, his subjective wishes, they serve to cause reaction, without even being conscious of it," anticipating Michaels' "iron Law of Oligarchy" (Ibid).

Notably, Bakunin thought Marx was vain and melancholy, while Marx thought Bakunin was a sentimental idealist. Bakunin, not Marx, was the proponent of destruction. Marx appears to have had a profound feeling of societal and personal insecurity. Bakunin despised social status, making it impossible for a man to compensate for his advantages rather than his deficiencies. Bakunin could accept a lower level of poverty than Marx, but he did not feel any loss in self-esteem. He was always in financial need but was not averse to spending money and was willing to give what he could to help others (Carr 439-440).

2.2.1 Anarchism and Literary Writings

Sandra Jeppesen in her article *Becoming Anarchist: The Function of Anarchist Literature* discussed mapping anarchist literary styles, production processes, and common tropes and topics. Her article argues for consistency in the values provided by forms of production and consistency in substance and form in anarchist literature. Anarchist literature also serves two purposes. These are interventionist representations in which anarchists disrupt the prevailing image machine and cultural prefiguration in which anarchist principles are incorporated inside the text and foreshadow the society we construct via our activities. Anarchist literature is, therefore, both a reflection and a result of the anarchist ideal, a literary manifestation of the never-ending perpetual anarchist revolution.

Even though the Spanish Civil War (1939-1945) and World War II (1939-1945) essentially stopped the growth of the historical anarchist movement in the United States, anarchist ideals were not simply crushed. Anarchism saw a revival of interest after the cultural and political protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and America. The doctrine's iconoclasm attracted feminism, ecologists and student radicals to the fore. Situationists in France were able to borrow elements from many non-libertarian groups at this time. They also freely adopted anarchist ideas to develop their ideologies.

Jared M. McGeough in his 'Romantic Anarche: The Philosophical and Literary Anarchism of William Godwin' analysed William Godwin's philosophical and literary Anarchism. To unravel this complexity, he approached Godwin through the lens of modern critics who have reread the ideals and theories of classical Anarchism using post-structuralist theory. This study does not reduce Godwin to modern Anarchism. It demonstrates that Godwin's texts are in constant dialogue with and deconstructed by the Enlightenment suppositions about his Anarchism. This questioning results in an understanding of anarchy that Godwin uses to refer to something other than Anarchism. Anarchy is a term that refers to something more in line with its roots meaning in the term anarchy. It's an existence without principle or origin. Godwin's corpus reveals anarchy that makes it impossible to imagine any rational politics. It shows rationality as being inevitably affected by its groundlessness. Godwin can also be part of a larger shift in history and ideas. This includes Romanticism which shows a growing suspicion toward the Enlightenment's emancipatory projects.

Satterwhite in an article argued that social movements had changed their philosophical base from Marxism to Anarchism over the past 20 years. This paradigm shift

is evident in the rise of Occupy Movement and global justice on the left, as well as the rise of libertarianism and crimethink Ex-workers Collective. This sociopolitical shift is evident, but literary critics in academia seem unaware of it. Romantic studies seem well-equipped to deal with modern Anarchism, given its historical roots in the political writings of William Godwin. Except for a few exceptions, anarchist literary theory is absent from Marxist-influenced Romantic studies. The Romantic period may be re-examined and reinterpreted using anarchist ideology.

It also provides new views on classic works. Minor works like George Dyer's political essays are given fresh attention. While literary studies are still relevant to post-Marxist audiences, anarchist views allow for a fresh look at the Romantic period. Over the last 20 years, social justice groups have shifted from Marxism toward a philosophical egalitarian, anarchist core. Influential contemporary thinkers like Noam Chomsky and Derrick Jensen, David Graeber, and the Crimeth Inc have contributed to encouraging and elaborating on the growth of numerous left-wing global justice groups. The Ex-workers Collective and the ascent of libertarianism to the right demonstrate a major paradigm change. Academic literary critics are not ignoring this apparent social tendency.

Romantic scholars seem well-equipped to engage with modern Anarchism, given its historical roots in the political writings of William Godwin. Although Godwin's study shows no signs of decline, it is fascinating to see the theoretical disconnect with the anarchist political theory he helped create. Romantic studies have a long tradition of studying radicalisms and moments in-depth, but little or no attention to Anarchism. This is a strange oversight considering Godwin's long shadow on the early Romantics. Anarchist-related studies are rare in Romantic Studies.

This results in a lack of anarchist literary theory. With a few exceptions, like Jared McGeough's work, anarchist literary theory is essentially non-existent in modern Romantic studies. Marxist studies, on the other hand, are robust. Anarchist thought permits an unorthodox examination of the Romantic period. It provides new insights on canonical works and smaller works such as George Dyer's political essays. An anarchist interpretation of Romanticism gives a new and crucial currency for a modern audience that is less inclined to accept Marxism as the only vehicle for radical analysis or any literary period.

Most individuals are aware of contemporary protest movements. They were created at the end of 1999 when demonstrators disrupted World Trade Organisation sessions in Seattle. This marked the start of the emergence of anarchist ideas, ideals, and players inside

movements. The Occupy Wall Street Movement is one of the most visible manifestations of anarchist philosophy in action. Thousands of people worked together, many using anarchist-inspired consensus methods, from New York City to Pensacola, to modify the political lexicon and discuss societal inequalities. The growth of Occupy Wall Street as an anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical organisation shows a shift away from the post-1960s Marxist vanguard approach to radical activity. Many activists who make it into academics are dissatisfied with Marx's influence in the classroom and the lack of anarchist thought, particularly in literary studies. Deric Shannon, a working-class Anarchist in the academia, spoke to numerous classes, including feminist, queer, and critical race theories.

Menna Eldwai Zein wrote an essay that outlines the philosophy and purpose behind Anarchism using an interdisciplinarity approach that includes literature and film. Apart from any moral connotations, Anarchism maintained the idea that there is an inherent balance or equilibrium between cosmic powers. This idea helped us understand how Anarchism could be applied in the cultural sphere. It also grounded the theory and practice of Anarchism within the political sphere. The thesis considered theory and practice within the anarchist tradition. It proposed redefining Anarchism using an interdisciplinary approach. This included a discussion of Youssef Ziedan's novel, *Azazel* and Charles Chaplin's film, *The Great Dictator*. *The Great Dictator* was a modern example of Anarchism as an ideal, practical ideology. *Azazel* provided an alternative history to ancient Alexandria.

Stephen Filler in his doctoral dissertation titled 'Chaos from Order: Anarchy and Anarchism in Modern Japanese Fiction, 1900-1930' argues that anarchism is a prewar social and political movement. Kotoku Shui advocated it in the first ten years of the twentieth century, while Osugi Sae expanded it into an aesthetic and political ideology in the 1910s. Japanese anarchists understood the reasons for the working class's harsh situation and supported the abolition of capitalist capitalism and other forms of governance. Literary anarchism flourished during this period in the form of essays, novels, poetry, and other publications by self-described anarchists. These works were created to promote anarchism's political ideology, capturing present reality, and encouraging revolutionary action.

2.3 Resistance in Post-Colonial Drama and Theatre

The colonial experience is more than a political reality. It's also a psychological invasion. When two unrelated cultures interacted, the invasion that began with the occupation of natural resources became a complex social phenomenon. As a literary strategy for representing local culture, Postcolonial literature was created. This is a useful strategy in

the nation-building process. The postcolonial drama, in the form of texts and performances, helps to resist and correct the harmful effects of colonial experience while simultaneously representing and reviving local cultures and histories. This includes indigenous cultural practices through their discourse. This is a shift in object position from Eurocentric colonial discourse into a subject position that allows for writing back to the empire. Drama and Theatre hold eminent positions both as literary genre and performing art, because they are used as tools to subvert colonial canon. They address the effects of colonialism with multipronged approaches. Postcolonial drama negotiates with issues of class, nationalism, and ethnicity. Ania Loomba is one such literary critic as she has written rigorously on Modern drama, Shakespearean adaptation, and Shakespeare in Postcolonial world. Hence race is an important question posed by Loomba as she states, “ideologies of colour were made more rigid as well as more powerful by colonialism” (Gilbert 9). Since the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's assertion that the term "postcolonial" encompasses "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day," the argument that postcolonialism is "not a naive teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism but an engagement with and contestation of colonialism" (Gilbert and Tompkins 11).

Despite this wide definition, postcolonial theatre studies (as well as other literary genres) have tended to focus on the strategies of textual resistance that arise after colonialism ends rather than the obstacles encountered by colonial power during times of foreign control. Because of the theoretical preoccupation with the ongoing impacts of imperial processes, the majority of the criticism concentrates on the performance and writing of euro phones (mostly anglophones) rather than compositions in the original tongues of former colonies. Bruce King's *Postcolonial English Drama* was geographically and linguistically restricted to England in the 1960s. *Postcolonial Drama, Theory, Practice, Politics* by Joanne Tompkins and Helen Gilbert covers a broader geographical range but gives comparable current ideas. Despite the writers' recognition of the importance of European languages in the postcolonial struggle, English remains the dominant language utilised in most of their works.

It would be pertinent to mention here the work of Barbara Harlow. Her book *Resistance Literature* is built around the framework set down by prominent Palestinian Thinker Ghassan Kanafani. In her publication *Resistance Literature*, Harlow extensively explores the framework introduced by the notable Palestinian intellectual Ghassan Kanafani. Providing a critique of Harlow's take Nida Arif argues that Kanafani

distinguishes between two categories of literary production: works created "under occupation" (*tahat al-ihtilāl*) and those composed "in exile" (*manfa*). This distinction is crucial for the analysis of resistance literature and rests on a few critical assumptions. Firstly, it presupposes a collective identity or cause shared by a "people" tied to a specific land. Secondly, it assumes the existence of an occupying power that has either subjugated or displaced the people from their shared land. (36) She further states that Harlow, drawing from Kanafani's insights, underscores his disclaimer in the preface, acknowledging a scarcity of sources and rejecting academic objectivity. Kanafani recognized the severe repression and censorship of resistance literature in Occupied Palestine, making it challenging to access. This acknowledgement of a lack of sources underscores the specific historical and cultural contexts essential for the genesis of resistance literature. In her subsequent work, *After Lives*, Harlow delves into the historical role of the separation between culture and politics. She discusses how maintaining this separation serves the interests of those in power by preserving their territorial elitism and ideological mystification. Harlow critiques the language of objectivity and transcendence, arguing that it conceals partisan positions and the sectarianism inherent in the self/other divide. (Arif 35-36)

According to Park, the colonial Korean anarchist movement (1910-1945) was long recognized as either a violent and extreme chapter of national resistance or a tiny, intellectual branch of the greater socialist movement. While both points of view are historically correct, they ignore the immense cultural impact anarchist beliefs had on a fast-modernizing colonial society. This article documented how anarchist ideas — particularly Piotr Kropotkin's theory of anarcho-communism—entered Korean culture via the international avenues of Japan, China, and Russia, as well as a comprehensive process of adaptation by local writers, poets, and other cultural operators. From Ho Munil's utopian book for peasants to Hwang Sogou's Ecopoetry and Sin Ch'aeho's revolutionary fiction to Yu Ch'ijin's thesis about people's theatre, anarchism has had a strong and varied effect on modern Korean culture. The development of the phrase *minjung* (ethnonational Korean people) played a significant role in 1920s politics. This essay examines three major ideas of colonial Anarchism that have left an indelible mark: popular insurrection, mutual help, and ethical naturalism.

Cawson argued in "Towards an Anarchist Theater" that this manifesto is impressionistic in its content and structure by necessity. The precession for failure is the inherent paradox of writing and structuring anarchist manifestos or trying to define

anything even close to a panic aesthetic. He tried to explain the principles behind my endeavour and suggested that anarchist aesthetics should be based on paideia. He believed that the absolute presence required by paidic participants is key to inciting life to the point where radical awareness can be achieved. This is both a political and an aesthetic act. Paidia is a principle of aesthetics rather than an art form. It must be the result of continuous experimentation and, therefore, adaptable. It is a theatrical rather than a political manifesto and does not detail the anarcho-syndicalist polemic. The assumption is that the reader will have sufficient knowledge of anti-capitalist arguments to understand the controversial drive.

This piece is stylistically loosely structured. It changes according to the content. These rehearsal techniques and the spirit of the manifesto are meant to be sketches. To be prescriptive would not be appropriate. These techniques were developed and adapted from a recently completed performance laboratory called Vacuum at Grotowski Institute, in collaboration with Robin Riegels, a Norwegian writer/director. This reflects my own experiences and not Riegel's. My focus is on the methodological side of things. This includes searching for a performance approach of a suitable acting style and not the selection or generation of material. It should be read in its intended playful spirit, keeping in mind that play can be as serious or light-hearted as it is serious.

Demirbaş investigated the roles of William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka in promoting cultural identity in their respective nations' postwar reformation, as shown in their plays *King's Threshold* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. He highlighted how Yeats and Soyinka utilised theatre to challenge the imposed ideology of English colonialism and build a new national consciousness and cultural identity based on pre-colonial national heritage. The analysis was confined to Yeats' *The King's Threshold* and Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman*, which were chosen for their aesthetic and thematic similarities. Both plays deal with an oppressive kingly authority that would eventually lead to the characters' deaths, and both authors depict suicide within their cultural setting. Through traditional myths, laws, and history, both playwrights resurrected cultural authenticity. Simultaneously, they exploited Western conceptions of theatre, specifically the old genre of tragedy, for narrative. While Yeats and Soyinka respect the ideas of ancient tragedy that lay at the heart of European writing, they also advocate their culture's norms and pristine mythology.

Richard Schechner in his *Performance Theory* notes that individuals universally adapt the social norms of their everyday lives to varying extents. The nonconformists or

defiant individuals challenge the established regulations, whereas only revolutionaries strive to dismantle them in order to bring about lasting transformation - a principle that is equally relevant to artists. The arts, especially the theatre, have consistently employed stereotypes and archetypes, frequently through parody or subversion. Practitioners who aim to achieve authentic performances and deeply understand a character can relate to these common portrayals. Role play exercises can help reveal these representations, but the true essence of the character lies beneath the surface. (23)

When we talk about postcolonial theatre and the “art” of theatre, Wole Soyinka stands tall. Wole Soyinka's work and politics is demonstrated in four ways: his philosophical and theoretical reflections on culture, politics, art, and literature, his concept of the "postcolonial crisis," his views on artist accountability, and a selection of his artistic works. Anarchism was the basis upon which Soyinka's work was constructed, and it must be investigated in order to completely comprehend his literature and politics. He uses the word "anarchism" to allude to the simultaneous annihilation of individualism and community in order to restore the "primordial source of existence," which Soyinka characterizes in his philosophical writings as the realm that transcends any specific ideology. Soyinka says primordial culture is romanticized because it lacks distinct social, economic, and political traits. As a result, it is the home of liberating forces. He questioned prevailing ideologies, whether from the "left" or "right," because they are too narrowly defined to account for human life and so "dictatorial and tyrannical." He envisioned humanity's ideal society as one based on the "ritual archetype," This enables the person to work for his community while breaking free from dominant notions and recovering his primal essence. He saw the contemporary crises as the result of the imprisonment and alienation of "primordial culture" and "modern" persons within distinct ideologies. Despite the political turbulence since their independence in many African Countries, the traditional performances remained alive in form of ceremonial rituals, seasonal celebrations and by travelling theatres. Crow remarks that Soyinka adherence to African traditions is probably a way to announce modern state can develop “from a collective recognition of the real historical inheritance and a visionary transformation of it, accomplished through the bringing together of past, present and future in a moment of ritual 'vision'.”(88) Despite the individual adherence to the ritual archetype, this ritual vision cements both individuality and solidarity together.

Drama and theatre are therapeutic tools as they bring into light oppressive autocratic system and these tools are vital in expressing prospects and distress of the masses. James

Gibbs in *Wole Soyinka* refers Soyinka as “an independent thinker with numerous theatrical skills and a vaulting ambition” (5) while providing detailed account of Soyinka’s works both published and performed till 1986. Soyinka challenges authoritarian regimes that are either of colonial or of national origin through mythic tragedies, that serve as a site for awareness about marginality and a hope for change. *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *A Dance of the Forest* are written at the dawn of Independence in Nigeria and Soyinka addresses his countrymen in these plays as he was concerned about the political future and future leaders of Nigeria. He attempted to provide exciting Theatre to his audiences which left them thinking about their conditions. Awam Amkpa begins his article *Postcolonial Theatre and the Ethics of Emancipatory Becoming* with Homi. K. Bhabha’s quote states that postcolonial critique reflects partial voices of cultural representation which are more concerned with gaining hegemony in the current world order. According to Amkpa postcolonial playwrights use Theatre and theatrical structures by calling into question these voices of metropolises who politicize histories and cultures of former colonies.” Femi Osofian assesses postcolonial drama and its function in a similar way and says “Against the inert silence which autocrats seek to impose upon their subjects, the dissenting artist can triumph through the gifts of metaphor and magic, parody and parable, masking and mimicry.” (11)

It is important to highlight that Soyinka attacks political authorities similar to anarchists but sets his social criticism from a historical perspective. His perspective of history is evolutionary which is a variant of Marxist which is materialist. Soyinka in his *Myth, Literature and the African World* is of the view that the process of creating art is fluid and not fix, its purpose is to free society from historical and other prevailing stereotypical ideologies. He envisions a society where maximum freedom is possible socially. Soyinka in his dramatic genius reflected death and life, creation and destruction, disruption and re-assemblage through local rituals and traditions and according to Walunywa “these traditions contain built-in mechanisms for constant resistance, revision, recuperation and revolution” (6) For Soyinka it is a consistent defiance and an attempt of breaking free from the shackles of those forces which confine individuals or community in social, political or economic impediments. These local rituals and traditions are cultural expressions of indigenous societies that survived imperial imposition and continued their resistance in neocolonial worlds. It is vital to realize that Soyinka through his dramas doesn’t canonize the idea of ‘oppressed’, ‘other’ or ‘colonised’ only rather focuses on the situations that shape a communal sense of marginalisation and people’s struggle for resistance.

Soyinka tried to establish new point of references within the African culture. He embedded Western dramaturgical models very effectively with Yoruba myths, dance, songs and above all rituals. He mastered fusion of Western form and African content in drama and theatre as a result of his formal education at Nigeria and England which assisted him to be familiar of both cultures. As James Gibbs highlights in *Wole Soyinka* a combination of “African performance idioms with the European traditions of dialogue drama” (23). Hence Soyinka was strongly rooted in his history and land simultaneously addressing the international audiences by raising his ingenuity to the domain of universal appeal.

2.3.1 South Asian Theatre and Resistance/Protest

In depicting the sociopolitical conditions of any society, drama and theatre play a crucial role. In her book, *A Critical Stage: The Role of Secular Alternative Theatre in Pakistan*, Fawzia Afzal Khan emphasises the political and historical contexts in which Theatre emerged as a cultural form. Afzal Khan highlights three major theatre companies: Ajoka, Tehrik e Niswan ²⁰, and Punjab Lok Raqs. Fawzia Afzal Khan contends that theatre can be used for "enlightenment, education, and action" (72). Two of these groups, i.e., Ajoka and Tehrik-e Niswan, emerged in the 1980s to combat Zia ul Haque's regime's radical Islamization through resistance, protest, and mass education. She goes on to say that these theatrical groups have made a contribution to the terrain of Theatre and drama in Pakistan, but that they need to embrace new concepts such as deconstruction, post-structuralism, and feminist movements rather than focusing solely on a feminist approach.

In her doctoral thesis *Shifting Terrains: The Depoliticization of Political Theatre in Pakistan*, Asma Mundrawala discusses how Ajoka and Tehrik e Niswan adopted the role of political Theatre during their formative years. Their origins are deeply rooted in the political ideology of opposition to Marshal Law and laws against women. Both of these Theatre companies adhere to the tradition of William Shakespeare and use Theatre to mobilize the masses for social equality. She states that after the end of the military regime, these Theatre groups were accepted by the democratic forces of state and society, thus shifting their focus from politics to social commentary and gradually assimilating into the dominant culture, as stated by Hajra Mumtaz. With the advent of neoliberalism in the 1990s, according to Mundrawala, Theatre in Pakistan became a commodity due to NGO funding, thereby promoting their agenda. It is a shift from activism to paid activism, the commoditization of Theatre that had served as a tool for sociopolitical critique, and the depoliticization of public life caused by development agendas.

²⁰ Urdu for Movement of Women

Salima Hashmi, an artist and educator, presented Faiz's comments at the end of her impressive presentation on visual arts and worked in Theatre cinema, and dance. She was also a founder of Sapan and showcased various works from various artists. This demonstrated that art is more than a product. It is about engaging with and criticizing where we live, how it is lived, and what we can achieve? Her emotive picture Poetry for Zainab was produced in reaction to severe domestic violence in the 1990s. It illustrates how a woman was mistreated by her husband in the most heinous way. Hashmi displayed numerous photographs from Awami Art Collective's public show Main Mare Gaye. They erected a bunting string at a park. Each bunting had a press article about a racial, sectarian, or other violence victim. The visible evidence of the countless lives lost to violence over the last two decades made the issue extremely evident to the city people who shared this area. Sangeeta Thapa, Kathmandu's cultural coordinator, as quoted by Preetha and Singh in their online article 'Singing in Dark Times: Art and Resistance in South Asia' stated that Nepal's art scene is an "old culture, but we are also new countries, and that comes along with its own trials, and tribulations."

In this researcher's point of view, this review would not be complete without making mention of the prominent Indian playwright Safdar Hashmi. His theatre group, *Janam*²¹ employed traditional folk theatre as a medium to transmit political thought and protest to the masses. Hashmi held the view that folk theatre should not be "vulgarised" or appropriated in order to be the medium, rather he felt that by retaining the indigenous elements of folklore, he would be able to translate his messages better. He is to be credited with the formation of the unique call "*Halla Bol!*"²². Since its inception, *Janam* has performed more than 4000 times, mostly plays by Safdar Hashmi. No facet of society was spared the scathing vision of Hashmi's pen, be it the bourgeoisie or the masses. He envisioned a special kind of relation between these two disparate factions; that in a bid to keep the masses subjugated, the promotion of nationalism and "Indianism" in Indian theatre and arts was carried out by the elite (Erven 142). By hijacking the narrative from the common people and making it serve the quaintness of "Indian culture", the masses were disfranchised from their own cultural rights. In essence, the formation of *Janam* was a resistance against this hijacking. Hashmi, as stated before, kept the purity of folk theatre, but did not subvert it, and merely used its elements to carry out his messages of resistance. Perhaps the messages did rub many of the elite the wrong way, for tragedy befell *Janam*

²¹ Sanskrit for "birth"

²² Hindi for "attack!". In a broader sense, a "call to arms" for protests or civil disobedience.

and its founder. In January 1989, a performance of Hashmi's play *Halla Bol!*, which dealt with labour and union rights, was disrupted by Mukesh Sharma, a right wing political candidate supported by the Congress. Sharma arrived with nearly a hundred armed goons. Upon refusal by *Janam* to stop the play, the actors were beaten and abused; a Nepali worker was shot dead. In a tragic turn of events, Hashmi was captured by the aggressors while helping his *Janam* actors flee. He was beaten consistently about his head and died from his injuries (Erven 141). There is no doubt that Hashmi was the target of the aggression. Such is the fate of those who dare to show the masses the truth and invite them to resist, as is their right.

Pushpa Sundar looks back in history in her article "Protest through theatre — The Indian experience" and saw that though the spirit of non-conformity is quite ancient in India. Protest was largely embodied in literature, both oral and written, and not in the form of Theatre. (Buddhism and the Bhakti movement of the Medieval years were, in a sense, also protest movements against Brahmanical doctrines and the tyranny of caste, creed and ritualism). Protest through Theatre was prominent only during three time periods: (a) 1870-1930, (b) 1940-1947, and (c) 1960-1980. In the first two periods, the protest was aimed against foreign control and social problems in Indian society; in the third, Theatre expressed dissatisfaction with political corruption, economic deprivation, and social tyranny in independent India. (Sundar 125)

The form of Theatre also differed between the pre-and post-Independence periods: in the former, protest Theatre was large of the traditional Western proscenium theatre type; in the latter, it reflected the new influences that had affected world Theatre and used the agitprop street genre extensively, though not exclusively. Though Theatre has existed in India for at least 2500 years, it would not have accommodated protest, political or social Theatre, in the classical period of Sanskrit drama because of the conventions of dramaturgy by which it was bound. These conventions, codified in the seminal work on dramaturgy, the *Natyashastra* (approximately second century BC to second century ad, stated that the main object of drama is to instruct through amusement.

Again, much more than in any other part of India, this new dramatic movement took root in Bengal. One of the best works of those years was Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* (New Harvest) produced in 1944, it is a landmark not only as protest Theatre, but also in Indian drama. The subject of the play was the death of five million peasants during the Bengal famine of 1943-44, a tragedy of horrendous proportions made doubly so because it was a man-made product of official incompetence callousness and human greed. Radical

in content and innovative in its use of language and stage craft, this play created history when, in March 1945, it was performed before seven thousand people.

Nabanna articulated all the anger felt by the people against a corrupt establishment and grasping humanity. It set a trend and inspired a few playwrights to convey the miseries of the poor and the dispossessed. Other plays developing such themes as the oppression of the landless peasants. None of these plays were doctrinaire or tied to any party line. They went beyond propaganda and are today regarded as Theatre of the highest quality. The same was not true of the spate of political plays produced all over India by the Progressive Movement, which slowly petered out in the 1950s.

Bhatia investigates Shakespeare's past in India. She claims that, regardless of their political commitments, theatre and writers have turned to Shakespeare and mythical and religious plays to avoid governmental censure. Bhatia then leaps to the mid-twentieth century to describe the Indian People's Theatre Association. This organisation emerged in the 1940s to use Theatre to combat imperialism and social and economic injustices. She analyses Utpall Dutt's *Mahavidroha* in a chapter on the twentieth century. This play is also analysed, which she believes undermines colonialist interpretations of the 1857insurrection. In her epilogue, she claims that post-independence India's women's street Theatre is beginning to confront previously unexplored subjects such as domesticity.

Jamil Ahmad in the essay titled as “Modern theatre in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka” expresses that theatre in Bangladesh solidly resists the Imperial Oriental paradigm that is rather prominent in other South Asian theatre. It is pushed and pulled in different directions by different cultural elements, both bourgeoisie and traditional (271). Bangladeshi theatre walks a fine line in balancing these two disparate features together. *Jatra*²³ and *Adhunik*²⁴ are two main forms of Bengali theatre, with *jatra* being a rapidly dying art form. In the *adhunik*, Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-74) is credited with bringing modernism to Bengali theatre via his masterpiece, *Nil Darpan* (The Mirror of Indigo). The drama, published in Dhaka in 1860 and premiered in 1861, sparked a large public controversy throughout Bengal, despite its European romanticist style. This discourse focused on the repressive practices of indigo growers, signalling the beginning of postcolonial struggle in Bengali theatre.

Ahmad further explains it was Rabindranath Tagore who balanced the Bengali identity with the foreign influences left over by colonialism. He was highly critical of

²³ Jatra: street folk theatre

²⁴ Adhunik: Modern Theatre

nationalism and the extremism that was taking over the Bengali society. His play *Muktadhara* was a revolutionary's call to arms, encouraging the downtrodden and ill-treated people to rise against their oppressors and take back their freedom. In 2011, the Theatre group in Bangladesh gave a heartbreaking performance of *Kālanemi (The Black Minute)*, criticizing modernity's use of science to rule nature. Mitra's *Achalāyatan (The Immovable)*, first performed in Comilla in 1921 and subsequently in Dhaka in 1980 by Nagorik Natya Sampraday, criticizes traditionalists in a stagnant Brahminical culture. Nagorik's interpretation showed Bangladesh as an inhospitable landscape trapped in the narrow-mindedness of Islamist religious prejudice, against a backdrop of increasing religious nationalism rooted in premodern Islamic beliefs. Despite his resistance to nationalist language, Tagore has emerged as a legendary figure motivating cultural nationalists in *Adhunik* theatre. (267)

Nepal's modern theatre as argued Carol C. Davis in the same article published in *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* owes its inception to outside exposure. This landlocked country is mostly isolated, but there are names that stand out in the history of bringing political theatre to the country. Balkishan Sama is one of them. Sama's plays, such as "Mutuko Vyatha" (Agony of the Heart or Heart Ache 1926), utilised blank verse and Sanskrit meter, focusing on the poetics of relationships. While actresses performed men's roles within the court, it was deemed inappropriate outside. In plays like *Mukunda Indira*, Sama broke conventions by casting young men in women's roles. Despite this, he pioneered the tradition of writing plays with realistic human characters and pertinent social themes. *Mukunda Indira* is recognized as the first modern Nepali drama. He is credited with the formation of the *Sama Theatre*. (277)

Aarohan Theatre actors are professional actors who present stage plays at Sama Theatre. When they performed *Lok Tantrik Natak* (Theatre of democracy), a style of political-street Theatre that arose during the demonstrations leading up to the 2006 Jan Andolan II, their role was doubled. Aarohan artists were also social actors and Theatre performers who portrayed themselves as Nepalese citizens struggling for democracy. Their theatrics were meant to alter reality. Peterson Anya Royce discusses the interpretive function of the performing arts and the "technical understanding, virtuosity, and creativity that make that role conceivable, and transformational." The performing arts are more than merely interpretation and representation.

This was obvious in the specific shape *Lok Tantrik Natak* adopted in Nepal's Citizen's Movement for Democracy and Peace. The artists' experiences demonstrated that

performing arts are more than merely an "ideological transaction." It is also useful activity. Aarohan's street performances and other kinds of creative protest contributed to creating a suitable environment for the Citizen's Movement to flourish and continue its efforts. Playwright Gopal Prasad Rimal (1918–1973) drew inspiration from Henrik Ibsen's realism and social engagement. In his play "*Masan*" (Cremation Ground 1945), Rimal explored themes reminiscent of Ibsen's "*Et dukkehjem*" (*A Doll's House* 1879), focusing on the dynamics between a wife and her husband. Notably, "*Masan*" became the first major Nepali drama to center around a defiant woman.

Kanchuka Dharmasiri, contends that there is a notable difference between Sri Lankan indigenous street theatre and "enclosed" theatre. The "enclosed" theatre is primarily a holdover from colonialism. There is a relative similarity between Sri Lankan Theatre and Pakistani theatre in the fact that most of these performances occur in closed spaces, a marked deviation from the typical culture of street theatre. Despite this "colonial" setting, Sri Lankan theatre has , managed to keep hold of its indigenous identity. The issue of language arises as well, since Sinhala, Tamil and English performances all form a part of Sri Lankan theatre. (286)

Sinhala theatre is marked by the creation of the theatre form called *Nurti*. Performed on spectacular stages, it differs from the more traditional *kolam*, *nadagam* and *sokari*, traditionally performed on streets and free of cost. C. Don Bastian (1852–1921) and John de Silva (1857–1922) pioneered the use of *Nurti* for enacting historical and religious narratives. Concurrently, in the early nineteenth century, In the 1940s, Ediriweera Sarachchandra (1914–96), a versatile figure in theatre, literature, and criticism, translated plays by Gogol, Molière, and Chekhov. During the cultural resurgence in the 1940s, dramatists sought a distinct mode of theatre reflecting postcolonial Sri Lanka's identity. Sarachchandra, realizing translated plays did not capture the times, created "*Maname*" in 1956, blending diverse theatrical traditions. His subsequent work, "*Sinhabahu*" based on the myth of the Sinhala race's origin, explored issues of filial piety, civilization, and identity. In the 1960s and 70s, translations of works by Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Luigi Pirandello, Tennessee Williams, and others became prolific in Sinhala theatre. Henry Jayasena's translation of Brecht's "*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*" in 1967 gained popularity.

In the 1960s and 70s, Sarachchandra's "*Maname*" inspired Tamil theatre, with S. Vidyanandan's exploration leading to "*Nondi Nadagama*" in 1961. Collaborating with Sinniah Maunaguru, they created "*Ravanesan*" in 1972, depicting the epic Rama-Ravana battle and addressing issues of war, justice, and chastity. Tamil theatre later evolved along

two lines: traditional kooththu and western forms. The 1983 anti-Tamil riots and the subsequent war disrupted Tamil theatre, dispersing artists. Despite challenges, Kulanthai Shanmugalingam focused on themes of violence, war, migration, and oppression. Theatre Action Group and Sivagnanam Jeyasankar's community-based kooththu experiments in Batticaloa aimed to address emotional traumas and preserve indigenous performance traditions in the face of globalization.

2.4 Literary Dimensions of Abjection/Social Abjection

Julia Kristeva's abjection theory was provided in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*, according to Arya. It was first published in 1980. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* was released two years later. It had a significant influence on Kristeva's Anglophone reception. Within the visual arts, there have been a variety of studies on the importance of abjection in cultural lives (Foster et al. 1993). Kristeva's theory was criticised for a variety of reasons, including her repudiation and claims to universalism, as well as the reification or abjection. This essay focuses on the second unexplored facet of Kristeva's thesis, the link between abjection and revulsion. This essay investigates if abjection and disgust are the same or whether they have distinct phenomenologist. They each have their intellectual framework, history, and setting. Kristeva's idea of abjection is based on psychoanalytic principles. Disgust is assessed initially by its negative effect on food, then in broader contexts.

The research paper “Abjection and Taboo Objects in Edward Bond’s Plays” by Khatoon examines Bond's preference for violence and madness in his plays. Julia Kristeva's theory on abjection, which was based on bodily fluids and repulsion, can help us understand the effect violence and madness have in Theatre. The psychoanalytical grid was used to conceptualize the concept. However, it can also be extended to describe behaviors in a human environment and our responses to them since abjection impacts all aspects of social life. In other words, the abject is all that is irrational and threatens all of the laws and taboos that protect our communities. It is a rejection. This paper suggested that Bond's plays are a good example of this kind of abjection. They feature scenes of violence and suffering, and horror. Different manifestations of abjection include taboo objects like emaciated bodies, bulletted, hacked and hanging.

Bond's varied violence represented different forms of abjection. They could harm an individual's identity and challenge law and order. The paper suggested that Bond visual objects violence as an irrational form through taboo items such as dead bodies and living

bodies becoming corpses. The Edward Bond plays' violence and horror are explained by Kristevan's field of social rejection (not just the psychic one). This paper uses this concept to explain Bond's use of obvious forms of onstage violence. Julia Kristeva's theory on abjection, which was based on bodily fluids and repulsion, can help us understand the effect violence and madness have in Theatre. The psychoanalytical grid was used to conceptualize the concept. However, it can also be extended to describe behaviours in a human environment and our responses to them since abjection impacts all aspects of social life. In other words, the abject is all that is irrational and threatens all of the laws and taboos that protect our communities. It is a rejection.

A terrible, black rebellion of being lurks inside abjection. It appears to be directed towards a threat originating from an excessive external or internal source beyond the grasp of the possible, bearable, and thinkable. It is there, quite close, yet it is difficult to absorb. It is a pleading, perplexing, and interesting longing. It does not, however, allow itself to be deceived. It rejects the urge that makes it nervous. It is safeguarded by certainty. However, the impetus, the spasm, and that leap are drawn towards another as tempting as they are condemned simultaneously. The vortex of summons, repulsion and unflagging determination leaves the one haunted by it utterly helpless. The twisted web of thoughts and effects he calls abjection doesn't have a proper name. The object he names or imagines as the abject isn't facing me is not one he can name.

Hien investigated the 'abjection/the Abject' in medieval literature in her research article "Exploring the Abject in Medieval Literature How the Abject Moment functions in Medieval Texts." The term "abjection." Abjection/the Abject, according to Hien, is "everything that does not fit into the social or symbolic order of things" (412) and hence must be removed from the order, deemed filthy, impure, and pushed outside the borders. As a result, the abject looks to be something new. It has no place in society and is hence labelled as the "other." The 'boundaries' established to exclude the needy enhance their otherness. The barriers were established to keep the needy out of civilization. The abject became an outsider by drawing a line between the exterior and internal. The abject was finally hidden from society by limits, becoming something unknown or unfamiliar, preserving its outsider position. Hien further espouses those medieval texts like *Beowulf*, *Njáls Saga* serves as a guide to the Abject. Snorri's *Edda* showed the fundamental nature of abjection as it pertains to its function inside a book. *Beowulf*'s abject moments revealed how abjection might be utilised to maintain the character of the "outsider," while

simultaneously exposing a society's vulnerabilities and concerns. When the abject took away fundamental societal values like Grendel's mother's wrath, the meaning of abjection was called into doubt. By appropriating these desirable values, the destitute questioned the societal conventions that moulded their identities.

Erika Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* talks about a Marina Abramovic's performance *Lips of Thomas*, in which an artist goes to great lengths to harm her body during the course of it. When finally, she lies down on a block of ice with her wounds bleeding, the audience is suddenly galvanised and interrupt her performance, covering her in coats and carrying her offstage. Fischer-Lichte uses this rather harrowing account to cement the madness of theatre and its potential for transformation. Most scenes in plays that trigger a person's sympathy or disgust are often passive. No one gets up to stop the villain on the stage or console the grieved. But, as Fischer-Lichte contends, theatre is strong enough to carry a person past the threshold of inaction. Much as abjection is a powerful catalyst, so can theatre be if it uses stimuli to demonstrate abjection for the viewer, thereby eliciting a response. (Fischer-Lichte 12-13)

Fronko describes Julia Kristeva's lexicon for abjection. Feminist philosophers have criticised it for being stuck in a male/female binary. It is examined for its potential to produce analyses. The terminology Kristeva uses is lexicon, not the common dictionary definitions. Kristeva further developed this terminology from the schools of Freudian, Lacanian, and Lacanian. It includes words describing the symbolic and semiotic interaction in spoken languages. This paper analyses two characters from Karin Mannheimer's play *Sista Dansen trans (The Last Dance)*. Two perspectives are used: Ruth Y. Jenkins' perspective, which identifies the dominant culture within a literary work and those excluded, and Karen Shimakawa's unifying strategy that combines Kristeva's and feminist theories. Two characters were chosen for analysis: Harriet, an elderly frail woman at the nursing home and Bogdan, an immigrant male caregiver. The title "*Who are I?*" refers to a subject's constant search for freedom from a condition they can't endorse and one that brings the subject happiness. The title "*Where are I?*" refers to a social condition, such as that of an immigrant who perceives discrimination or exclusion. It is found that Julia Kristeva's theories can uncover a variety of issues by studying linguistic articulation in terms of containing signifiers which mark the boundaries to what a speaking subject experience. This brings to the forefront the richness and complexity of Mannheimer's social criticism.

Demir investigated the penetration of the abjected semiotic into the symbolic in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. An examination of drama studies reveals that the recent spatial shift has largely overlooked drama's spaces and that the current level of spatial critique cannot effectively explain the spaces in Beckett's drama. These plays are significant because they show spatial binarism and death imagery. They also provide the analytical tools for this thesis. These plays repeatedly display the same concerns Kristeva uses in her symbolic, semiotic, and abjection theory. Kristeva claims that the subject-to-be becomes a subject in symbolic and that the semiotic disappears after thethetic break. However, remnants or residuals of the semiotic, such as death, may still be visible. This thesis proposes that Beckett shows how the semiotic is infiltrated into the symbolic in the three plays he has just mentioned. In each play's opening scene, Beckett divides the onstage and offstage areas spatially. Information concerning the offstage region, which is depicted with images of death, is conveyed through language and actions. Death imagery encroaches on the off-stage area, or the off-stage semiotic is originally rejected. Beckett's drama exhibits the abjected semiotic. This does not imply, therefore, that the symbolic can handle semiotic. In Beckettian drama, it can be assumed that the onstage space is symbolic, and the offstage space is semiotic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the onstage space is often an interior space. Even though it isn't depicted in these plays (as with Beckett's *Happy Days* or *Waiting for Godot*), the space is still constrained, and there are signs and routines. Everything is visible and well-known in the onstage space. This can be done either by the stage directions or the characters' actions. The offstage area remains unexplained, unlabelled, and unidentified.

According to Arya, Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection, as described in *Powers of Horror*, emphasises the importance of physical experience in our lives and explains our behaviours and attitudes toward our surroundings. There are parallels between the phenomenology and revulsion of Abjection. Both were marked by visceral emotions of aversion to a source and the impulse to reject it differently. Abjection in a psychoanalytic context refers to the rejection of the mother before the birth of an autonomous subject and the subsequent rejection of repulsive substances later in life. Is there any other significant difference between Abjection and disgust?

Kristeva's psychoanalytic framework of Abjection about evolutionary psychologists and analytic philosophers help to explain why Abjection was left out. Abjection is a type of hate connected with high levels of dread. While we strive to escape it, it captures our

attention. Abjection was the gloom at the heart of human life. Although disgust and Abjection have certain phenomenological similarities, the intensity of dread (and consequently terror) differs. The zone of distaste connected with Abjection was the most frightening. We try to prevent it as much as possible, but we also want to be able to accept it. Kristeva's idea of Abjection is about a societal demand for terror and the unconscious process it signals. The evil aspect of human life is Abjection.

2.5 Drama and Theatre: Grief of the Writers, Guilt of the Audiences/Readers

According to Seokhun Choi, in his article titled as 'Rehearsing Bereavement with Laughter: Grief, Humour, and Estrangement Affect in Sarah Ruhl's Plays of Mourning' explains that contemporary Brechtian study is concerned with empathy for the materialist foundations of the V-effect and its repercussions. Krasner, Woodruff, and others attacked Brecht's restricted notion of empathy. They framed it as an emotional and cognitive reaction required of theatregoers. Other notable Brechtian academics have questioned the usual interpretation of Brecht's stance toward emotion. They established a strong argument for Brecht's subsequent move to a more favourable view. It is unclear if passion impedes logical critique. Although Brecht and his critics recognized the importance of emotional connection in theatre audiences, their perspectives assume that emotion should somehow contribute to the goal. However, as Thompson noted, focusing on "effects—identifiable societal results, messages, or consequences might cause people to ignore the radical potential of the freedom to appreciate beautiful, dazzling things." (178)

In his post, Seokhun Choi highlighted how theatre might be viewed as a site of grief in various ways. In the Western classical tradition, theatre elicited many losses. It resurrected previous events and resurrected the voices of people who had died. It enabled the "playing out" of projective losses, those phantasmatic complaints that could not be expressed in ordinary life. Ruhl's theatre was developed to unite people who are flesh and blood. They have the right to laugh and grieve, and their emotions can be channelled into socially beneficial activities. As a playwright, Ruhl's genuine interest in and empathy for grief and emotion contributed to an increased "appreciation and appreciation of the roles of feelings and bodies in making sense," which "recalibrated historical hierarchies that had denigrated bodies and feelings, as well as theatre and performance." Ruhl's theatre enabled her people to live free of usefulness and celebrate their emotional liberation. They might also converse with one another, laugh at one another, cry together, or do both.

Modern loss and grief dramas investigate the complexities and seriality of mourning. They represented recent shifts in our understanding of mourning. Instead of the five phases of mourning defined by Elisabeth Kubler Ross in her 1969 book on *Death and Dying* (denial, anger, bargaining, and depression), they presented a more complicated and muddy experience (Helen Wheatley 2021). According to modern grief theories, grief is a complicated and personalized process. It can be cyclical or episodic, and it is frequently ongoing. There are also continuous oscillations between emotions and sensations. These new grief theories teach us to embrace and live with our sadness rather than ignore or eradicate it. So, it seems that television serial plays on mourning portray the grieving process as complex and unending. These programs remind us that mourning is a unique experience, not a common pattern (Wheatley 202).

The use of numerous strands of long-form serial storytelling allows for various viewpoints on mourning. Many characters may respond differently to the same death. The current turn of American television demonstrated that television might be the ultimate medium for sorrow. Three factors make the modern drama series she has been writing about particularly well-suited to depicting the bereavement process: The series' length, serial style, and playing with narrative. According to Wheatley, one of the most prominent examples is the NBC series. *This is Our Story*, for 90 episodes and five seasons, this show followed the Pearson family's narrative. It is uncertain if Jack Pearson (Milo Ventimiglia), the Pearson family's father, died at the start of the season. This show's episode format alternates between the past (documenting people's lives) and the present (documenting the lives back and forth). From the beginning of the series, she experienced the ramifications of his death for his three children, Kevin, Kate, and Randall (Sterling K. Brown). They had despair, drunkenness, feelings of unhappiness, comfort eating/chronic obesity (closely related to the grieving story), and severe stress and worry. As the protagonists were joined by those who had experienced different sorts of grief and loss, their sadness became more complex. Several loss experiences similarly compounded their tales.

Price detailed a review of the literature on childhood grief in 'Deathucation: On Childhood Bereavement and Drama Therapy Grief.' The author evaluated existing theories on child loss. These included the dual process coping model, chronic grief, grieving chores, and a three-part model that looked at key mitigating aspects to a loved one's death or suffering. The efficacy of bereavement intervention was also debated. A thorough evaluation of the literature shows what bereavement intervention children require. There

was also a discussion of the history of theatre therapy and childhood loss. The report concluded with a discussion of themes discovered to be beneficial in grief. Psychoeducation, communication and expression, support, persistent connection, continual investment in life, continuing relationships, the ability to say farewell, trauma interventions, joy, and reinvestment were among these.

Stroebe, M, and H Schut presented the dual process coping model was the most widely used mourning model. Dual process coping examined two categories of stressors: loss-oriented and grieving-related stressors and restoration-oriented stressors. It was proposed that youngsters "oscillate between these two forms of sadness or escape them by not mourning." Chronic sorrow is defined as the repeated occurrence of melancholy or other grief-related feelings due to the youngster recognizing that their reality differs from what they wish. It explains why children cry at each stage of development.

Another idea holds that grief entails several activities. Accepting and admitting death is an important first step. Coping with loss, connecting with the departed, adjusting to their lives without them, finding meaning in the death of a loved one, and investing in life are all part of it. Children in any sequence can complete these tasks. The amount of time each child spends on each assignment will vary depending on their age and other factors. Other contextual elements include other people's grieving expressions and mourning acknowledgment in school and peer groups, as well as religious and cultural beliefs and traditions. Weber described youngsters who saw their mother's violence and death at the hands of their dads or stepfathers. Weber discusses how to work with children who have experienced catastrophic sorrow in this chapter. He recommended employing specialized equipment such as a doctor's set, emergency trucks, and stuffed animals. Children must have authority. Due to the devastating nature of the work, Weber also emphasised the significance of concluding and anchoring each session. Weber also emphasised consistency in how sessions are done, end times, and room setup. The case stories at the conclusion demonstrate how drama therapy provides a symbolic, emotional, and creative distance for the kid to examine painful, haunting situations without overwhelming them. (Weber 34). This is because the drama therapist maintains an artistic gap between them.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, it is vital to notice that concepts and lenses of anarchism and abjection with their social implications and analysis in drama and theatre are not very frequently employed by literary critics. Therefore, this research primarily foregrounds these concepts to analyse Usman Ali's Anglophone drama and theatre in Pakistan. This research is significant in raising critical debate about Usman Ali's plays for comprehending and understanding social anarchism and its multipronged aspects of class struggle and survival, resistance, exploitation of the masses.

According to previous studies, anarchism is a political theory that is skeptical of the justification of authority and power. Bakunin understood that imposing abstract ideas on human behaviours was a constraint and with the emergence of anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism, the need to resolve the tension between the individualist and collectivist tendencies essentially became moot. This engagement with Bakunin points to a larger project of recognizing the continuity of anarchism as a body of thought and practice in literary criticism. Bakunin's ideologies are a way forward to think about what's at stake when people struggle without a clear idea of the obstacles to transformation and when they engage in theorizing that stifles revolutionary practices.

This research is also rationalizing abjection as the otherness of the masses in Ali's plays. Ali's characters are the commoners, and his plays depict their struggle in the time of loss and chaos and hence their disgust for these social conditions. The abject has no position or place in society hence it is considered the other. These two phenomena of social anarchism and abjection are reflections of Ali's grief as a writer and his attempt to awaken the audiences and the readers about the conditions of his people alongside liberating theatre from its colonial roots and presenting a more indigenous outlook. Ali's thematic concerns as a creative artist for the loss of theatrical traditions in his country Pakistan is his lamentation simultaneously a catharsis while he attempts to portray his people, their passions, their deaths, their ambitions, their rage, their fears, and their aspirations that make Ali's Theatre tick.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL ANARCHISM AS ALI'S MAJOR THEMATIC CONCERN IN *THE LAST METAPHOR* AND *ODYSSEY*

“That is what I have always understood to be the essence of anarchism: the conviction that the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met”.

(Chomsky 775)

The focus of this chapter is to provide a close reading of Ali's *The Last Metaphor* and *The Odyssey* in the light of social anarchism, from various aspects such as the gulf between the rich and the poor, protest and resistance by defying the workings of ideological and repressive state apparatuses, seeking individual liberty, and re-visioning the resistance. Ali's thematic concerns are deeply rooted in Pakistani society and culture. His plays are not merely an aesthetic escape but a convergence of the environment and everyday life of a commoner residing in Pakistani society. In his plays, Ali creates various thought-provoking intersections between literary productions and growing dissent of the intelligentsia in a developing country like Pakistan. By employing performing strategies, Ali's plays frame the indigenous experience.

The Last Metaphor comprises of three acts, and is a two-hander play that contains the characters of Banka and Jugnoo. Both are gangsters. The play opens in a one-room apartment where Jugnoo appears with a masked face and carrying a dead body draped in white sheets. Banka paid the visit to the leader of the gang, Jugnoo, to convince him to come out of hibernation and lead the gang once again. Jugnoo is struggling with his thoughts since he met an accident and found this corpse. Banka is curious to know about the carcass kept by Jugnoo and wants to get rid of it, but Jugnoo is so much in love with the corpse that he beats Banka and does not let him touch it. The course of the play reveals Banka's mental and physical conditions. The non-sequitur exchanges between these two characters also provide a social commentary on the prevalent conditions, simultaneously shedding light on the struggle of social outcasts, and providing an insight into how state

machinery such as the police oppresses people and exert abusive authority and absolute power. The play's action, time, and place keep changing. Not much detail is provided about the physical appearance of the characters. The identity of the dead body is revealed at the denouement: it is a dog. Ali reveals the story behind the composition of the play in the introduction stating, "I was traveling from Mandi Bahauddin to Gujrat when I heard the sound of some bones being crushed and the van came to a rest. I came out of the van and saw that a dog had been crushed by the van. The conductor called me in, but I was transfixed by the heap of crushed bones." (Ali 3)

The Odyssey (2014) is set in the backdrop of the war on terror in Pakistan in the wake of 9/11. According to Edward Bond "the play is an attempt to cover the world's wound with a bandage" (Bond p 3). The three-act play revolves around three main characters: Penelope, Telemachus, Odysseus. It opens with a scene that introduces Penelope and Telemachus to the audiences while Odysseus is absent. As the play progresses, we realize that Balli has rented the basement of Odysseus' house while Telemachus is being abused sexually by Balli and his friends Babar, Birju, and Billu. He is seen in utter anger because his father being a soldier in the war against terror, has left his son and wife Penelope for the last two years at the mercy of such people. On his return, Odysseus finds his home shattered as Telemachus is HIV positive as a result of the abuse he endures. He is caught by the police with a suicide jacket, implying that he is a terrorist in the making. It is important to note that Ali has adapted these characters from the Greek drama, but he places them in Pakistani social context to give an indigenous outlook. Ali's setting of the play is of a typical Pakistani lower middle-class family that is fighting for survival against social, economic and political oppression. These characters do not belong to the nobility or the elite. They are commoners hence reflecting the social conditions of the masses.

3.1 State Authority and its Machinery Synonymous to Domination and Exploitation

Anarchism as a doctrine aims at radical reconstruction of social, economic, and political spheres, largely by defying the state and its mechanism of establishing authority and power. In this section, my purpose is to provide an analysis of Ali's *The Last Metaphor* and *The Odyssey* and how anarchism as an opposition to governmental centralism is embedded as a main thematic concern in the plays. Defying political authority stands for the idea that governments and states rule to foster their aims and it creates hegemony of a minority and overlooks the majority i-e masses. This concept of placing the command in the hand of the minority while the majority must obey eventually results in creating power structures.

Even a flock of sheep would resist the chicanery of the state if it were not for the corruptive, tyrannical, and oppressive methods it employs to serve its purposes. The state is the altar of political freedom, and like the religious altar, it is maintained for human sacrifice. (Goldman, 1911)

The continuation and maintenance of any system of class rule create economic and political corridors of power, thereby legitimizing intimidation and force along with the use of violence. Bakunin espouses in *Marxism, Freedom and The State* “The State is nothing else, but this domination and exploitation regularized and systematized” (66). Two pertinent questions in this regard are how the state maintains its authority and what are the basis of rejection of authority by the anarchist school of thought. This section primarily analyses these questions by closely reading Ali's *The Last Metaphor* and *The Odyssey*.

Instead of accommodating the marginalized classes, the state further pushes them in such a pit of misery from which recovery is almost impossible. Ali portrays the state not as the saviour but as a powerful authority that is exploiting the conditions in which the masses live. Ali is voicing the concerns of a commoner when Banka says, “Building new roads and making new hospitals but ignoring the stagnant pools.” He repeats this sentence and says, “They call it progress”(22). Banka believes that the state is investing in infrastructure instead of investing in people, especially those who are leading miserable lives like “stagnant pools” Likewise people who are immune and numb to the prevalent social injustice are ‘stagnant pools’ as they are comfortable with their place and position in the society since they are not facing any kind of trouble. They are not the stakeholders.

Jugnoo and Banka carry a degree of anarchism against the state and its machinery as they are both looking back in anger. Banka's character is representative of authority practiced by self-awareness in form of violence. The play opens with Banka looking at the audience, “What is it?” (Ali 3) Ali has commented that these opening words attempt to get the spectator's attention to the fact that the situation in Pakistan affects us all. He is a victim as well as an observer of how the state power is exercised upon others. Banka vocalises the horrors he faces at the hands of police. “Police takes me at night, beats throughout the night and drops me at my door in the morning”. (Ali 7). This physical abuse coupled with sexual humiliation that he receives publicly reflects how state machinery is stripping people of

their human dignity. It is a dehumanization brought on by state sanctioned “servants of the people.”

Banka: They stopped me. Yes. Held me by the collar of my shirt. Touching my cock and ass with the barrel of a gun. (Ragging) Yes! Slapped my face in public, people watching me. Yes! Yes! A human being. No. No. (Roaring with rage)

He continues.

Banka: One of them asked me to take off my Kameez. Asked me to lift my hands and bound them behind my head. One was touching me with his finger and the other. (Ali, 34)

Banka faces this tyranny at the hands of the police. Although being a gangster he fits the criteria for interrogation, yet he does not deserve that inhuman torture in public where the custodians of the commoners have become agents of control, subordination, and tyranny. The state hides its repression behind the mask of law, with an irony of protecting its masses. The abuse of power by police is a common phenomenon in Pakistani society. Pakistan inherited a Police system that has roots in the colonial past, based on strict scrutiny of masses instead of protection as Siddle calls it "a public frightening organisation, not a public-friendly agency." (4). This very institution like many others carries the baggage of colonial legacy by protecting the powerful and controlling the masses rather than winning the trust of the community.

This notion of protecting the national bourgeois and demeaning the masses in the Postcolonial world through such institutions is also echoed by Fanon in his groundbreaking work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Here it is evident that the new elite has used this very institution as an apparatus for a litany of crimes of corruption and maladministration. As it is suggested in Commonwealth Human Rights initiative Report titled as “Feudal Forces: Reform Delayed” that "The hierarchal structure makes it more loyal to the regime and leadership rather than to the rule of law" (19) consequently making it the least-trusted and most feared institution. The violence inflicted by state institutions becomes what Bakunin calls "an immense, crushing, threatening reality" (113)

Not only Banka is seen suffering at the hands of police, but Jugnoo’s father is also brutally interrogated as Banka explains the behaviour of the so-called custodian of the masses:

Police raided your house... Tortured your father to ask where you are. They dragged your father in the street. His clothes were torn. One was kicking him, and the other was dragging him. Two men dragged his legs, the other two his arms and threw him into the van. Jugnoo's father was dragged like that. (Ali 33).

Police is unfortunately an institution of terror rather than an institution of protection because in Pakistan the political intrusion in this state institution has made it difficult for a commoner to get justice and protection. Largely defamation and embarrassment at the hands of police is an everyday affair in Pakistan. The anarchism in Ali's plays is a cry against the odds and wrongs that exist in Pakistani society and in other societies in general, deeply aimed at human sentiments of freedom and justice for all. Rasul in his article "Police Brutality" hints at the systematic lapses by law and enforcement agencies of Pakistan and says that according to "HRCP 3,345 people have been killed in police encounters from 2014 to 2018" which he believes is synonymous with "state-sponsored brutality."

Ali's theatre highlights this issue of global concern where state machinery is used against its people. The state legitimises the use of physical force, as Ronki Ram argues that in the last few decades, role of states as governing bodies has been decaying gradually across the world. (521) Hence states are "failing in facilitating governance" (Ram 521) and its people. He further asserts "the issues and problems faced by the people at the hands of the states are global" (528) which means this abuse of authority is not limited to the global south only, it is much prevalent in the global North through in subtle ways most of the time and cases such as that of George Floyd emerge. This incident on May 25th, 2020, in Minnesota caused quiet outrage, and the protests almost took over the globe.

An African American George Floyd was choked in bright daylight by a white police man named Derek Chauvin. His final words "I can't breathe" became a cry of protestors under the mass movement across the globe titled "Black Lives Matter". BLM moved against the sheer violence and use of extrajudicial force by the police. This incident brought the entire system of power and oppression under scrutiny, Not only that, the recent protests against the aggression in Gaza sparked another chant: "Move cops, get out the way. We know you are Israeli trained". It is a very telling sentence that ties together two seemingly disparate systems of oppression. Bakunin argues that either it is democracy or dictatorship, a state's violation of justice, compassion, and integrity results in crime at the cost of ensuring its hegemony. He further encapsulates "while [...] small states are virtuous only

because of their weakness, the powerful [...] sustain themselves by crime alone” (135)

Ali finds traces of state-infused violence in Pakistan that are less racial and more power-driven. It is an insight into a socio-political system that creates the divide of powerful and powerless, which is more lethal in a way as it victimizes people irrespective of their colour, caste, creed, and age. This indicates a system that follows the ideas of 'might is right, or 'survival of the fittest'. As Ali portrays in *The Last Metaphor* the real-life incident in 2010 when two young boys, belong to Sialkot, Pakistan named Mughees and Muneeb were lynched by a mob who declared them thieves. Jugnoo, the gangster, witnesses the brutal killing of these two boys at the hands of the public in presence of police, and he is shaken to the core because of this very incident despite the fact he is involved in criminal activities. Ali is giving voice to the humane aspect which is louder irrespective of the status of the individuals. The police remained a mere spectator and hence an accomplice in the murder of these two innocent boys. Jugnoo explains it to Banka; 'A circle around the brothers. Two beat them and the rest watched...the police van arrived, and the policemen came down and stood silently'. (Ali 20) Jugnoo is shaken as he calls it:

A cheap theatre without tickets and curtains. In the first act, the shirt is taken off... In the second act, the hands are tied and third act, they are slapped. The fourth act is the spit. The fifth act is the slap. At the end audience, claps. (Ali, 12)

These harrowing scenes work on two folds: one it lays the foundation of change in Jugnoo's character and transformation in his ideology, and, secondly, it reveals the power tentacles deployed to effect control, indicating the anarchist perspective of Bakunin that "authority and power that are not placed safely in the hands of the masses must eventually fall in the hands of their oppressors. "Anyone who is invested with power by an invariable social law will inevitably become the oppressor." (Bakunin 144) Ali is vocalising the protest the oppression which is not only exerted upon those boys but upon an average person residing in Pakistan. Ali brings to light the inhumane and violent aspects of power, humiliation, and exploitation in a so-called democratic society, hence highlighting the fore felt resentment of the populace. Humans are reduced to such a level of humiliation where there is zero no regard for their freedom and the police is merely an ostentatious institution for so-called public safety and security.

As a watchdog for the ruling class, the police frequently serve as a vehicle for postcolonial authority and power. Rather of acting impartially for the general benefit, it often sides with the powerful, participating in horrible crimes like murder. Ali courageously

takes on the societal wounds caused by the state apparatus, illuminating the numerous ways in which it deprives common people of their honour and dignity. Too frequently, the institutions designed to maintain law and order instead prolong pain and misery via cruel treatment and the degradation of fundamental human rights.

Jugnoo is not referring to one incident but a vicious circle of never-ending power abuse. Ali's reference to the real-life incident in Pakistan in *The Last Metaphor* is like Dario Fo's famous play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. Fo focuses on the idea of impossible and sustainable reforms in the state and its machinery, denouncing the law enforcement agencies and the whole legal system, smashing the state idea of protection of every individual. Jugnoo's lament against the police is an experience that is global. The rise of the BLM and the movement "Defund the Police" is an example of how oppressive institutions have the same modus operandi. Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970) focuses on police corruption and allegations of government complicity in response to events in late 1960s and early 1970s Italy. It addresses, in particular, an anarchist's death while in police custody following a blast. Although most people thought it was the consequence of a violent interrogation or murder, the police stated it was a suicide. Through infiltration, double-talk, and mimicry, the drama explores this corruption. A fast-talking figure named The Maniac breaks into the police and reveals their inconsistencies and cover-up surrounding the anarchist's demise. His methods are similar to how police informants infiltrated left-wing organisations in Italy. The Maniac personifies the corruption that is shown throughout the play through his dishonest words and deeds.

As Chimwenje (2015) states Fo (as cited in Chimwenje, 2015) reveals "state-sanctioned violence and repression, painting a sordid picture of the Italian police and judiciary." (28). Ali's play *The Last Metaphor* is like Fo's theatre in questioning the hegemonic power structures that curb the common man. The difference is that Fo's theatre is more political while Ali's theatre is more humane and focuses on bringing a change in society by infusing more empathy among his audiences.

Oppressive and exploitative state structures tend to maintain the status quo without regard for the due course of justice. State apparatuses and law enforcement maintain an exacting binary of the oppressed and the oppressor. The recent crackdowns against the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) student encampment against Israeli policies is proof; innocent students were subjected to bear mace, violence and physical abuse, while protection was offered to the Zionist hooligans. The police actively drew the binary with the oppressed and powerless being the students, and the oppressor the all

powerful Zionist lobby. The same can be seen in the *The Last Metaphor*; Jugnoo witnesses the death of two young boys while law enforcement stood by and did nothing. While the police brutality appears as the norm, the fact that it is a global experience is and should be a cause for consternation. In his attempt to portray the realities of the common Pakistani, Ali has also drawn a line of solidarity with the globally marginalised and oppressed.

State oppression is a major thematic is a fertile ground that as routinely been explored by renowned Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeem, under the theatre productions of Ajoka. Shahid Nadeem seeks to highlight the ills perpetuated by state apparatuses in maintaining a clear difference between the oppressor and the oppressed. Ali's theatre has significant similarities as they both emphasise by drawing attention to the repressive processes of state institutions. Both explore the complex network of governmental entities, exposing their frequently predatory nature. With plays like *Barri (The Acquittal)*, Nadeem discusses the overt abuse of women through power structures. The story of "Maryam" is a classic example of how state apparatus drives the binary of the oppressed and the oppressor. Maryam is raped in jail by the prison officers and is forced to undergo an abortion that she initially refused. Here it can be observed that Maryam seeks to start a new life with the child, even though it is a product of rape. She is denied even that hope. Her incarceration, the rape and subsequent oppression is driven by the unchecked power that these structures hold. They are merely the foot soldiers of a massive class system.

Ali takes up the sensitive issue of war on terror as a central theme in *The Odyssey*. The war on terror has its roots in the 9/11 attacks in the USA. Pakistan's geopolitical landscape is crucial on the international political map. The rise of militant groups like the 'Taliban' in South Waziristan and Federally Administrated Tribal Areas was the prime factor that initiated this war by the government of Pakistan in collaboration with the US. This war created divergent opinions among the masses, as some supported it while the others believed it was, and is, an imported war. The religious and political polarization is the menace that our nation failed to cope with to date, an insidious consequence after nineteen years of the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan is still fighting against terrorism. Several literary responses emerged from metropolises and peripheral literary circles that gave rise to a narrative of Islamophobia and portrayal of Muslims as extremists, but simultaneously Muslims authors providing a counter-narrative of moderation and how the extremist narrative impacted Muslims living in the first world socially, psychologically, and emotionally. Mohsin Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007)* discusses the aftermath of 9/11 on Changez, the protagonist, who despite enjoying a privileged position

in the US faces the consequences in form of hatred and investigation being of Muslim and most importantly of Pakistani Origin.

Ali's *The Odyssey* is a different literary response to 'war on terror'. Through his dramatic artistry, Ali explores the lives of people who have suffered from this war. Ali investigates how it impacts the lives of those who are a participant as soldiers at the war front and those who died in this war as innocent victims. The state's decision of 'war on terror' not only created cracks and crevices in the socio-familial system but also inflicted sufferings and pain among the commoners and caused damage to the social fabric of this nation. Just like Fatima Bhutto recreates the scenes at Mir Ali right after the 9/11 attacks a place in the tribal belt of Pakistan in her novel *The Shadows of the Crescent Moon* (2013).

Ali in *The Odyssey* moves away from the glorification of war and focuses on individual dilemmas of universal implications. Telemachus's character reveals anger, resentment, and protest the glory of war. It is evident in the opening scene/act of the play how he responds to his mother Penelope's questions in utter trauma and irritation.

Telemachus: "Answer my fucking question. Have you washed my clothes or not?"

(Ali 2)

This very opening reveals the mental and emotional instability of Telemachus. It depicts that the war on terror has deprived him of his father's presence at home. Odysseus as a soldier is on the war front for two years and Telemachus along with his mother Penelope facing social and emotional exploitation at the hands of people like Balli, Birju, and Babar, who are criminals and later found out as terrorists. Telemachus is a young boy who has lost the meaning and purpose of life. A sense of displacement and catastrophe is clear right in the beginning. War has caused social and familial schizophrenia in Telemachus, and he is broken and has no sense of belonging. Fallen Telemachus finds himself in crisis and his emotional chaos and distemper are evident from his resent when he tells his mother that he does not want to reside in this very house anymore. Penelope tries to convince him that it belongs to his father, but he replies, "My father fights for the state but his son is alone... The state he fights for can't give a single free cup of tea to its people" (Ali 10)

His fury and hatred are clear reflection of his suffering, and it seems he is looking back in anger just like Jimmy Porter of *Osbourne* when he articulates in *Look Back in Anger* "wrong people going hungry, the wrong people being loved, the wrong people dying." (94). Telemachus becomes bitter and reveals his contempt for his very existence and the reason

is evident; he has been wronged by the society and people in the absence of his father. Jimmy Porter is also in a constant conflict as mentioned by his wife Alison “something is gone wrong somewhere “Hasn't it? He is always demanding for his existence, dignity, and identity.” (63). The audience and the readers may find Telemachus an irritated and angry young man who is least concerned about his home and mother. However, the other side of the picture is that he is the mouthpiece of the dissatisfaction and dissent and appears to be a figure that has witnessed right values in a wrong world. His emotional tirades are attempts to shock those who are enthusiastically defending the war narrative out of their complacency. Telemachus, who has lost meaning of familial and personal life in the absence of his father, faced sexual exploitation. The foundation of his faith, being a religious boy, is dismantled. His rage and fury indicate rejection of state decision of war, since war is a fiasco faced by humans under the control of the state. As Telemachus states "Those who were living are dying and those who are dying can't be buried...There are no fathers in Pakistan. Do you hear? We have no fathers in Pakistan." (Ali, 11) Like Osbourne, Ali has probed into familial and personal relations, and he employs the imagery of personal tensions drawing attention to the public issues. Just as Richard Schechner holds forth in his *Performance Theory* analysis that everyone in society puts forth a performance. These performances can either be rigidly governed by social order and rules, or either exist on the periphery of society and therefore, portray the ground realities. The “fringe” element of theatre has consistently led it to run in trouble with authorities, who fear the dissent and social awareness that comes with such plays. History is replete with many such examples. Schenscher therefore believes that performance theory is a “social science” theatre is a “linguistic mirror” that playwrights hold up to the world (253) Ali’s plays very much fall into the category of plays that bring everyday life to the stage.

Telemachus realises he is being wronged in the name of nationalism and by the state and the society as he says” What hell can be bigger than this state for which your husband fights.” (12). Ali appears as an emotional and social activist as he cannot laugh on idiocies of the people who rule and who are in power corridors of Pakistan, keeping the primary concern of human conditions in Pakistani society. Statism instils and injects such nationalism that demands loyalty while it overlooks patriotism which offers a loyalty. As Chomsky believes that patriotism is thinking about the welfare of society its people, and its culture which is vastly different from the fostered beliefs of not being critical of the state and its policies. This excerpt from *The Odyssey* is ample proof of the aforementioned concept:

Eurycleia: The war on terror is over.

Penelope: Yes. We are waiting for Odysseus (Ali. 6)

Newscaster: (Breaking News. It is informed that the army has finished the operation against the terrorists. The soldiers are pleased that they are returning home. Finally, the long-awaited peace. People are celebrating peace by dancing in the streets and eating sweets) (9&10)

Despite the massive losses incurred by the people, despite the pain and grief of fighting a war not their own, the people are still celebrating the end of the war, of a victory. Ali is depicting the view of every nation-state that justifies horrors of war because Bakunin opines as Maxim off stated in *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*:

The supreme law of the State is self-preservation at any cost. And since all States, ever since they came to exist upon the earth, have been condemned to perpetual struggle — a struggle against their populations, whom they oppress and ruin, a struggle against all foreign States, every one of which can be strong only if the others are weak — and since the States cannot hold their own in this struggle unless they constantly keep on augmenting their power against their subjects as well as against the neighborhood States. It follows that the supreme law of the State is the augmentation of its power to the detriment of internal liberty and external justice. (137)

The state narrative of war has brought psychological and emotional dilemmas to both the mother and the son. Those who govern the state decide for their interest blinding themselves from those who are governed. For Odysseus, the war waged by the state has shattered two things: him and his family. Odysseus, who is a war hero, questions his participation in this war that involved him in killing his people. He questions the very nature of the war, as he as a soldier is saving the state and his country while his own house is shattered. He meets Zeus and Ajax (who?). This is Ali's perspective that war is futile; it brings no good to the people of any country. Ali demystifies war and revitalizes the sorely needed idea of the futility of war. Ali expresses that whether it is the war of Troy or war on terror it creates a conflict and rift in the social fabric of any society in which innocent people suffer.

The episode of Penelope, where she meets the Trojan women who are in anguish and warn her, provides description of the miseries and sufferings of the war. Circe says "Never fall in love with a warrior" (18) Hecuba warns Penelope that war results in

destruction and “No one is safe. It is becoming dangerous” (23). These Greek female characters who have witnessed horrors of war find parallels in the character, Abdullah, a man of Afghan origin, in Kamila Shamsi’s *Burnt Shadows*. He tells an American, Kim, that “War is like an infectious disease. You will only realize it when you will have it . . . countries like yours they always fight wars, but always somewhere else. The disease always happens somewhere else. It’s why you fight more wars than anyone else because you understand war least of all. You need to understand it better” (Shamsi 350). Military power is deployed to have conquest, but it also is a weapon of narrative building that is employed to keep the masses fearful of any harm to their sovereignty. The sole purpose of any kind of rule or state is to perpetuate its power and control. States employ deft acts of subjugation in the name of law and order. Similarly, Bakunin (1873) sees states and their narratives of ideology and nationalism as tentacles deployed to effect control. These turfs are played upon by the state to keep the masses oppressed and deprive them of their fundamental rights. Ali’s anarchist perspective is revealed in form of dissent and resentment of socially marginalized classes. His idea of anarchism is rooted in presenting it as a questioning force that enables masses to realise their position. His stance is to resist these institutions by questioning their dominance and control and bringing them out of their scared roles.

3.2 Class Conflict and Struggle for Survival in *The Odyssey* and *The Last Metaphor*

Defiance of the dominant class structure in any society is one of anarchism's key tenets. Bakunin's main contention is that social stratification and class structure are a result of political and economic inequality. The social class system, social hierarchy that is repressive for the masses are major concerns of Usman Ali, as he depicts in *The Odyssey* the struggle of a powerless woman against the powerful society. Survival is one of the major concerns of Usman Ali in *The Odyssey*. Penelope, a woman, who is doubly marginalised because of her social class and gender must survive and deal with socio-familial circumstances in the absence of her husband. In this play, Penelope is seen struggling to come to terms with her circumstances and trying to hold out against the societal and class edicts at play around her.

Penelope is making sacrifices and adapting to the hardship in the absence of her husband and is consoling her physically abused son just because she cannot fight powerful men like Billu, Birju, Babar, and Balli. She has to give the basement in her house on rent to earn the living for her family, but these men have not only abused her son but also have

taken advantage of her husband's absence and have crippled her socially and financially. Billu, Birju, Babar, and Balli are social metaphors of the oppressor and Telemachus and Penelope of the oppressed. Penelope and Telemachus both are too weak to stand against them, reflecting what Bakunin in *Statism and Anarchy* espouses as the dichotomy of haves and have-nots, the oppressor and the oppressed and the powerful and the powerless. They are part of a society where the powerful enjoy all rights and the underprivileged are treated as rubbish and a site to practice oppression and tyranny. The social patterns can be altered according to the rules of authority as they serve the interests of the powerful. It is a very common observation in such societies where power influences every minor and major social structure, state institutions and economy. The political classes are made up of all the wealthy and privileged people who have access to bourgeois education and control over both land and capital, as well as the working classes who have been disenfranchised in economic and political life (Bakunin, 33). Hence, saying social classes are political classes as they define who will enjoy political privileges and the fruits of governance will not be off the point. They stand in direct relation with one another to exercise manipulation, hegemony and dominance.

Penelope's plight holds some parallels with Vijay Tendulkar's Gomti in *The Vultures*. The socio-cultural setting within these two plays is centered around class oppression and exploitation. Much like Penelope, The Vultures' titular character Gomti is a lower caste, rural woman who falls into the hands of her exploitative higher caste neighbor Saheb, after her son is jailed for theft. What Gomti and Penelope have in common is that they both are mothers left at the mercy of an oppressive society. Penelope is rendered helpless by her socio-economic status and absence of a male head of the house. Her helplessness is compounded by patriarchal dominance asserted by her tenants. Her tenants symbolise these opening lines from *The Vultures*:

“Five vultures

On the swinging branch...

Of her rotted hopes...

Five... Vultures...” (1)

Penelope fails to save her home and son from these vultures, unlike Homer's Penelope, who is able to send off her suitors. Oppression is driven by men drunk on their power and social standing. They are willing to suppress any and everything that seeks to upset the binary that benefits them. This binary works very well in the current scenario of

Pakistani society where the elite are powerful men who are at the highest level of social hierarchy and state. It can be a martial law administrator or a prime minister, or any local MP. In other cases, it may simply be a minor difference of having a government job, or by virtue, or curse, of gender. A similar situation happens in the case of Penelope in *The Odyssey*. In act 1, she appears to be loyal to her husband to the extent that she doesn't allow her son to cut the tree his father has planted. She says to her son "Kill me before you cut the tree." (Ali 24) Here the tree is a metaphor for shelter, protection and growth but instead, Telemachus and her mother become socially and financially vulnerable, so he wants to cut this tree because it is irrelevant and worthless for him as a child. He believes his social and financial traumas are because his father left them in a society that is more like a vulture and is ready to take away from him and his mother whatever they have. Their social struggle is the struggle of survival against all sorts of odds they are facing. The same odds result in massive trauma, physical abuse in the case of Telemachus and Penelope's powerlessness. She cannot protect her son from the powerful men around her. Likewise, her helplessness against patriarchy and social status quo is evident in Act one when Telemachus explains to his mother how he is abused by Birju, Babar, Balli, and Billu but she only says "God will take your revenge. He is with the weak. He will never leave us alone." (Ali 9). This may be interpreted as stoicism and fatalism that is shown by Penelope, but this reflects a class-stratified society where might be right and the oppressed masses are victims of the powerful on a daily basis. It is closely tied to Penelope's feelings of helplessness, wherein she simply accepts the great evil done to her and her son; she leaves justice in the hands of her Creator. Her grief becomes her guilt, the guilt of being a born poor. She understands her otherness, her being an outcast in a society that does not value her human existence. Therefore, these classes serve as a vehicle for establishing an oppressive and exploitative social, political, and economic system. In addition to dividing society into the wealthy and the impoverished, the bourgeois and the proletariat, Bakunin also underscores divisions between nationalities and races. The core of Bakunin's distaste for hierarchy are the structures or the systems of control over the "masses". He is of the view that the miseries faced by the underprivileged and the powerless masses demean their existence to the extent that they become unconscious of their plight, even though numerically they are in majority in any society.

In *The Odyssey* Ali utilizes basic structure of the play to allow the progress of the narrative in such a way that it involves audiences in the tension and hence immersing them fully in the unfolding of the plot. Penelope appears as a typical oppressed woman who is

caught in the shackles of marriage, whose husband is absent and is treated as a mere object desire by the people around her. She is powerless, underprivileged and the sole breadwinner for her son Telemachus, since Odysseus is fighting for the state in the war against terror, leaving his family to the terrors closer to his home. In Act one, Penelope is seen struggling with her son's resentment and dissent. Telemachus is frustrated because of the conditions that render him helpless. Their social struggle is coupled with psychological, emotional, and economic traumas; it results in guilt and grief. Since Telemachus is psychologically and emotionally suppressed as a result of the sexual abuse he endures at the hands of his mother's tenants, he questions his mother as to why she married his father and gave birth to him. He argues with Penelope in Act 1 and says, "You married against your desire, just to fulfil your father's wishes. But you must have been in control of yourself after marriage. "Why did you allow him to touch you?" (Ali 2). This is a manifestation not of common anger but of guilt emerging from deep grief.

Similarly, Ali's *The Last Metaphor* introduces us to the gangsters struggling against the bourgeois society that is numb and immune to violence and injustice. The underprivileged gangsters are not only standing against the state's tyranny but also against the lost consciousness of the bourgeois society. *The Last Metaphor* opens with two outcasts and socially marginalised characters, Jugnoo and Banka, who are gangsters exposing the dehumanization they witness and experience. Both represent a class that is neither owned by the state nor society. The valid question in this regard is that although being gangsters and are not socially acceptable, but still, they receive attention from political mafia. Having said that, it must be noticed that these characters have emerged from a Pakistani society where class divide is dominant.

Ali's portrayal of these characters is a pacesetter in cultural criticism, much like the characters of Harold Pinter in terms of themes of social disparity. Just as Pinter's characters represent tensions and attitudes of modern-day England, Jugnoo and Banka are men in the modern world beaten down and reduced to the margins of society. Additionally, the simplicity and straightforwardness of Ali's plays are reminiscent of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter*, and *The Caretaker*. It seems like Ali is taking notes from Pinter's creations and resultantly achieves this sinister effect not only through physical violence as in Act 1 Jugnoo beats Banka and "throws him down and punches into his belly. He brings a pistol out of his pocket and puts its barrel into Banka's mouth." (8), but also through creepy, quiet expressions of his characters, as Jugnoo and Banka both stare multiple times at the audiences while staying silent.

Jugnoo's stares and silences are meaningful as he avoids communicating with Banka, hesitant to reveal the transformation in his mental and emotional conditions. Jugnoo strikes a similarity to Pinter's tramp and non-conformist Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*. As both suffer and raise questions about things happening around them. Just like Gus, Jugnoo questions why nobody pays heed to the noises they hear when someone is shot. Jugnoo's question "What about the dead?" (Ali 21) echoes Gus's concerns about how the body of their victim will be disposed of, and who cleans after they leave the venue where they murdered. Jugnoo, like Gus, is a rebel who is seeking individuality in the world of power and victimization. Dukore is of the view that in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* "there is a cry of despair from a well of human hopelessness." (54) The same goes for Ali's *The Last Metaphor* but with the difference that there is a ray of hope for a humane change in those who are considered inhuman individuals of the society.

Characters like Jugnoo and Banka emerge on a daily basis in real life because their lives are miserable and pathetic. These challenging social conditions where day after day people strive to earn bread give rise to frustration, anger and dissent which makes individuals tread the path of criminals and gangsters. They are considered outsiders, who are not accommodated in social structure, yet both can raise their voice or question the authority of state institutions and raise pertinent questions about the state's functioning. Ali has centralized his play with gangsters and seems to detach his plays and theatre from the hegemony of bourgeois and aristocratic theatre which is mostly foreign-funded and is set in metropolises of Pakistan.

Ali has kept his plays firmly grounded in Pakistani society and close to the raw experiences of the organic subaltern classes that are immediate and direct. Hence localizing the trauma, apprehensions, and anger to depict the lives of the common people residing in Pakistan. They are representative of what Bakunin (1873) calls *lumpenproletariat* which according to Sam Dolgoff (1971) consists of "submerged classes: unskilled, unemployed and poor worker, poor peasant's proprietors, landless agricultural labourers, oppressed racial minorities, alienated and idealistic youth, declassée intellectuals and bandits" (14)

It would be pertinent to mention that Bakunin is a Marxist-style anarchist who believes in the class stratifications and struggle against them. If the semi-bourgeois workers are to become the new ruling class, then Bakunin believes that they are sufficiently sullied by bourgeois principles to be considered the 'flower of the proletariat.'(xvi) But it is those who Marx and Engels (1846) referred to as *lumpenproletariat* – the "non-civilized, disinherited, wretched and illiterates" – who are ostracized and overworked, the "rabble" or

"riff-raff."(xviii)He believes that this group is free of capitalist conceptions and so carries the germs of revolution within it. He is saying that the desire to resist is the greatest in this group. Banka and Jugnoo are tramps, non-conformists, and spokespersons of the declassed as they have nothing to lose but their lives; their "self" was lost long ago. Much like Brecht, who exalts in his play's antisocial outsiders like pirates, prostitutes, and adventurers, Ali has also put the misfits in the limelight and humanised them. They can be rightly placed as the declassée elements that are left behind socially and economically alongside those that cannot fit into the society, hence opening the vistas of class segregation and class divide prevalent in Pakistani society. The dead dog is a metaphor; symbolic of the common citizen living life on scraps and random kindness. The manner of the dog's death (the dog is hit by a van) symbolizes the class system where the privileged class is depriving the non-privileged class of their basic right of living. They can crash into the fragile edifice of ordinary human life and leave nothing behind. It is echoed in many such real-life cases in Pakistan including the case of Mukhtaran Mai²⁵ as well as the abduction of Mudassar Naaru²⁶. In such circumstances, the idea that class divide is a catalyst for anarchism and a rejection of the norm is not so far-fetched; it is a glaring fact. The recent protests by the Baloch people against the "state" is proof of that. Banka is a disciple of Jugnoo. Both these characters have a hard-bitten edge to them that is cynical to the extreme. Anarchy drips from their dialogue, especially for Banka. When he finds an electricity bill of Two Thousand rupees, he says sarcastically "Well! The State gives you light and you must pay for it" (Ali,7). This particular dialogue sets Banka's character solidly. It depicts Banka as an anarchist figure who rejects the idea where individuals and masses must pay to the state for basic needs of life, while the same state and its machinery fails to provide quality life.

²⁵ For further information, see Kaur (673-679)

²⁶ For more details, see <https://www.aajenglish.tv/news/30278557/>

The frustration and dissent of Banka in this sentence is speaking volumes about the exploitation of the classless people (those who are at the lowest point of economic, social scale) in a class-divided Pakistani society. Ali's depiction is as real as it gets; the masses struggle against a social stratification that has divided societies into two major classes; oppressor and the oppressed. Hence Telemachus and Banka both are bitter towards the discrimination, socio-economic conflicts; the dilemmas they are facing are very much rooted in the class divide and class struggle. Both these characters serve what Fouzia Afzal Khan espouses "emblematic of the larger struggle between the have and the have-nots, between the oppressed masses and the ruling elite" (11) Usman Ali has taken a leaf out of the theatre of liberation and political theatre; he has presented and tried to make the masses aware of their rights and their needs, "both within and against the status quo of the nation-state" (17).

Ali's theatre and drama is a mosaic painting that is coloured in indigenous socio-cultural conflicts. He views conventional approaches to theatre as escapist. There is evidence that he is more interested in garnering truth and realism than to uphold escapism, thereby rejecting the idea of escapism but upholding the virtues of idealism. Ali's goal is not to provide a neat plot and storyline, but to raise puzzling questions and confront the audience with unanswered ones.

3.3 The Role of Individual Freedom in Shaping Human Nature

The significance of individual freedom in shaping and transforming human nature is geared towards a progressive evolution. The aspiration for lasting change reflects a collective yearning for an improved future characterised by self-emancipation. Self-emancipation in Ali's plays is seen as a gradual breakdown of the notions and norms that govern society. According to Bakunin, "the urge to destroy is therefore a creative urge." In Ali's purview, his characters are struggling through myriad issues and a degradation of their self. For them, the institutions in their entirety are not a matter of concern; state brutality and power tactics are less of a concern than their otherness and the abuse they endure. Thus, their oppressor is their mental conditioning; they are afraid of what people will say and do to them. Self-emancipation is based on a nascent idea of individual freedom; only if the idea exists in a person's mind does it proceed to its full form. Although Bakunin talks about collective action and the destruction of institutions, the premise can be applied in Ali's plays as well. Even though his characters are working in an individual capacity, their descent to the outermost fringes of human society is such that they act out of desperation to break through

the mental shackles that societal institutions have put them in. They do not seek to overthrow the physicality of the institutions. Rather they seek an end to their mental slavery. Within this framework, individuals engage in a process of questioning established norms, expressing dissent towards social and political authorities, and protesting against their marginalisation. The essence of standing against these authorities is rooted in the resistance to being relegated to societal ghettos. This ongoing process underscores the dynamic nature of societal evolution, driven by individuals actively participating in reshaping their destinies. This quest for individual freedom which leads to individual freedom is often driven by catalysts, such as guilt and the desire for exercising oneself in complete autonomy. These catalysts arise from traumatic events that leave immense suffering and abjection. The descent becomes too much, leading to a desperation that translates to anarchist thought and finally, it changes the complacency that makes humans obedient and apathetic.

Most sexual abuse survivors speak of guilt being an overriding emotion. Guilt is an emotion characterised by tension, regret, and remorse about a particular action or inaction. Guilt has a cognitive component, in that the negative emotion presupposes one's responsibility for the problematic action or inaction. The attribution of responsibility to one's own behaviour (something that can be changed) is important, insofar as it suggests and motivates different behaviors that can make amends for the previous transgression. In Ali's plays, specifically *The Last Metaphor* and *The Odyssey*, guilt is illustrated through the suffering of the characters, their inaction in preventing atrocities. In Telemachus's case, guilt comes from his inability to stop his aggressors, and from his helplessness in preventing his father from leaving. For in Telemachus's mind, his father was his protector, and hence could have stopped the abuse from happening. He also feels bereft because he is a pious boy, he calls for prayer at his mosque. Therefore, his guilt encompasses his religious feelings as well. When Penelope tells him to ask God for help, Telemachus's response is that "God did not help me in the basement" (Ali, 20)

The act of abuse is multi layered, with the abuser making use of their "power" in a sense, to exploit their victims' state of helplessness. It is very telling that while abuse does not discriminate among social classes, it does not, however, discriminate on that mantle of power bestowed upon the abuser. This state of helplessness coupled with an inability to stop it, fosters guilt. It builds questions of inadequacy and worthlessness. To what end, then, does this guilt take a person to? Guilt can often spur a person to action; whether to assuage the feeling of it, or whether to create a way where they can create a catharsis of sorts. It can

be argued that guilt can serve as a catalyst for action. Now whether the action is positive or negative, that remains a question.

In *The Last Metaphor*, the main wellspring of Jugnoo's guilt is witnessing the mob death of the two young brothers. The inaction that paralyzed Jugnoo in that moment becomes a catalyst for further introspection. Jugnoo's attachment to the dead canine corpse is very telling. The attachment, one that lays bare the complex patterns socio economic factors, abuse and class divide factoring in its development, is a way to make amends, somehow. By caring for the corpse, Jugnoo seeks absolution and action to right his past wrongs. Furthermore, Jugnoo's act of resistance is self-emancipation; his very name translates to "firefly". A firefly glows just enough to seem a soft beacon of light. His symbolic burning of all the material that he comes across and terming them as social institutions is a part of Jugnoo's awakened consciousness, an act of realisation bought about by his humanity and his desire to self-emancipation. As Morris states "[T]here is ... something about guilt, its connection with caring for others, perhaps, too, its connection with caring for ourselves, that may lead us to think it essential to human life as it should be" (93)

Karl Jaspers coins the term "metaphysical guilt" in an effort to explain the guilt that is faced by many as a part of the human experience. Metaphysical guilt is twofold; the guilt we feel for not preventing something bad from happening, and the guilt that comes with surviving when others have died. (Wilson 94) The guilt that Jugnoo feels upon the death of the canine, or the guilt that Telemachus feels as part of his abuse and his powerlessness both echo these facets. Jaspers holds forth on the premise that personal survival and transcendence is often at the expense of others. And if we examine this in the light of Ali's plays, it becomes apparent that this undercurrent runs through his characters' guilt. Penelope's survival came at the expense of Telemachus's abuse, Jugnoo and Banka's survival came at the cost of them being gangsters. At the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, these characters jettisoned moral trappings to justify their survival, and therefore grapple with guilt as a byproduct. These characters may not understand what they are going through, but it is evident to the reader that guilt colours their day to day lives.

In his work *Die Schuldfrage*, Jaspers has set forth a four-pronged schema for the categorization of guilt(a) Criminal Guilt, (b) Political Guilt, (c) Moral Guilt, and (d) Metaphysical Guilt. Criminal guilt is the act of transgression committed by man against societal criminal laws, political guilt is incurred by the elite political class for trampling

those who are under them, moral guilt comes with a personal sense of culpability, while metaphysical guilt comes from the human experience. According to Jaspers, metaphysical guilt involves the thought process that one must (or ought to) face for not being able to show enough solidarity with the notion of a universal humanity to take decisive action when humanity is in danger. If one chooses to survive rather than actively confront the terror, then the paradox of doing nothing, and the tragic outcome of an "inner migration" (Innere Wanderung) in the face of terror, is metaphysical guilt. Therefore, metaphysical guilt is the guilt of being.

Ricoeur in *The Conflict of Interpretations* frames guilt as a revolution of consciousness in the experience of great evil (428) Ali's characters have faced great evil, and if we to isolate two of the greater ones, they would be oppression, both social and physical, and abuse of body and self. In *The Last Metaphor*, Banka details his sexual abuse in descriptive and painful detail. The evil these characters face becomes the wellspring of their guilt; it is a transformative force brought into being by their helplessness and socio-economic oppression.

The character Telemachus has suffered at the hands of authority figures, and he is also wronged by his father which led him to rebel against every form of authority around him. It is Telemachus's desire to take control of the narrative that leads him to seek out his freedom; freedom from the norms that have created an outcast of him and his mother, that drove his father away from home and caused all the misfortune to befall him. The following lines show Telemachus's rebellion against the norms of society that have curtailed his individual freedom:

Telemachus: "Sweet dead husband. Wow. What kind of romance? Why didn't you stop him touching your body the night of your marriage? You could have stopped him. you married against your desire just to fulfil your father's wishes, but you must have been in control of yourself after marriage. Why did you allow him to touch you? False marriage beds, all marriage beds are false, do you hear? You made love to each other without thinking about what disturbing soul you were going to give birth to. Filth and disgust. Why did you give birth to me? Why didn't you control your carnal desires? She strangles Penelope you could have avoided him.... (Ali 12).

The above-mentioned lines show that inside Telemachus' psychology, rebellion has been nourishing for an exceedingly long time. By denigrating his parents' relationship and decrying the social shackles that held them together, he rejects the existing social norms

and the social practices around him which have taken away his human innocence. This rejection inside Telemachus leads him slowly toward destruction as noted in the above-mentioned excerpt (Ali 12) when he starts cutting his ancestral tree. While the tree may seem to be a passive element, Ali has embedded it with a deeper meaning. The play ends with the crowd moving '*under the Neem tree*' and singing their spiritual song. He mentions '*under the neem tree*' (40) five times consecutively in the end. The neem tree symbolizes *Dhan Mantri (the Aryan god of medicine)* in the ancient Hindu belief. It was believed that the goddess *Sinhala* lives in the Neem tree and gives passage to the people towards heaven (Consolaro 111). Therefore, the Neem tree in the play presents absolution and restoration of society. The play was surrounded by the corruption of the government and taking the dead bodies to Neem tree instead of the government shows the transformation needed for the society. Neem has healing and purgative powers, and as a metaphor, it serves well to demonstrate that despite all odds, healing is still possible.

When Penelope is considered in Ali's play, we see a dichotomy. At the start of the play while her husband fights a war, Penelope is seen as a typical housewife, one that is made doubly troubled by the abuse of her son and her poor social standing. Along with her son, Penelope suffers the same abuse. However, the strains of Telemachus's rebellion are catching, as evidenced later. Ali in his plays has combined the socio-familial aspects of class struggle and class exploitation because of domination and in the name of state authority. Telemachus's behaviour has become aggressive since he was denied the ability to make his own decisions. He holds all the authorities in his vicinity responsible for his misery. His dissent is a manifestation of him exercising his conscious individual freedom; Telemachus wants an out from his circumstances. He needs to regain control of himself and his fate. Which he does, but in a self-destructive way. When Odysseus is made aware of Telemachus's HIV positive results, he starts hitting and beating his son. Here we finally see Penelope's transformation; she stands up to her husband and threatens to knife him. This should not be seen as a simple threat; Penelope has finally broken the bonds of societal servitude and in doing so has liberated herself. Ali's play has a strong presence of feminism which he presents harshly and brutally. He showed that men such as Odysseus, take full responsibility for everything in society, and females are not allowed to make their own choices. However, when something goes wrong then the blame is put on the females. In the play *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus comes back home and realises that his son has HIV and it is not genetic, he puts all the blame on his wife that he left his son in her protection, and she could not protect his honour. As mentioned by in the play, "It is about responsibility and not about Accusation." (Ali 19)

Ali has also shown that patriarchy is instilled in society to such an extent that women and children believe that the state in which they are living is only safe with men protecting them. Ali condemns the idea of a society where women and children are at the mercy of men which is an element of anarchist philosophy. Anarchism promotes the idea of the formation of a state where communities are living in harmony with mutual agreement with each other and there is no fear or dependency on a specific group or gender (Land and Daniel 925). Ali discusses that the present Pakistani society is a society with tyranny and oppression and where there is oppression; individuality dies. As presented in the following lines from *The Odyssey*:

Hecuba: "No one is safe, it is becoming dangerous, and people keep on living. How do they live? Speeches, Speeches, Speeches everywhere. They can't change their mind. They can't change the natural law. They can't bring back the dead. They can't protest. They are afraid and can't come out on the streets. To whom should they talk? They can't bring. Look at them. (Ali22-23)

Ali uses anarchism and feminism in his plays to explore personal issues and clarify the fight for liberation. Penelope finds her liberation in standing against the set norms of her society. When detractors of anarchism discuss individual liberation, they frequently make the error of bringing up the word "anarchy" in the same sentence. The word "anarchy" connotes disorder, violence, and chaos. However, the researcher contends that individual freedom leading to anarchy is a complete process. Through McGeough, we have Godwin's work on anarchism, who faced tyranny and injustice by his state. He contends that human intellect is the most crucial factor in understanding and resolving society's and state's problems. Therefore, only a civilised individual could be expected to act honourably and sensibly. According to Godwin, the individual is where society, social criticism, and social programmes all begin and finish. He maintained that moral behaviour on the part of an individual is especially crucial to bringing about social transformation. But harm done to a single person might result in archaism, and since anarchism is irrational and disorderly, it only becomes worse.

The philosophy of anarchism discusses that the class system creates oppressors, and they hide the truth from the people and create a system where individuality disappears, and the vulnerable groups are at the mercy of their oppressors (Neal, 1997). In *The Odyssey*, this idea is presented thus:

Odysseus: Things always change it is necessary to degrade others to raise oneself.

Penelope: Vicious circle of notions.

Odysseus: The notions are given to us to block our minds. Notions, notions everywhere. Notions for living and notions for dying, but mound of grave erases all the notions. You're in a grave and people pass over your grave. What is the right notion that must be decided? (Ali, 6).

The thought that Ali is emphasising here is that in the state there are people with power, and they are the ones who make laws and oppress the vulnerable groups by presenting them with a set of rules and regulations to follow which has nothing to do with their individuality. Ali further discusses that a society run by tyrant rulers does not give any freedom to an individual; like anarchism theory, which suggests that when societies are ruled by oppressors, they block the consciousness of the people so that they cannot think and that makes it easier to rule. Ali further suggests that in such kind of society the only way an individual can have freedom is through death. He also talks about lies fed by the government to the people and how they show the people only what they want them to see and the only way to have freedom is to depart from this world ruled by oppressors.

Humans need to know the whole truth. This includes the truth related to social communities and economics, and if humans can learn the truth and organize themselves then, they have the hope to eradicate oppression. Ali discusses the same idea, through a conversation between Ajax and Zeus. He has demonstrated that to achieve individual freedom and to run the society in a social order it is important for human beings to know the truth about their society and the natural laws. He also argues that even though death uncovers the universal truth to the people the social classes must find the truth before it is too late. He also argues that the basic Instinct of individual freedom to get rid of oppression is to know the truth:

Hades: No one lies here. Truth becomes the shade. The lie is killed by death. What remains is a passive truth, the very truth becomes a shade. (Ali 34).

However, as the dialogue continues between Ajax and Zeus, Ali further explains the need for anarchism to bring down the political oppression of an individual:

Ajax: No human being is sacrificed. They are killed, my Lord.

Zeus: What is the difference between sacrifice and killing?

Ajax: One shouldn't come to the underworld to learn this. Why can't we be wiser when we are alive? Is it compulsory for everyone to die to know the truth? Am I to teach the great God the difference between sacrifice and killing? Clouds killing in a lie become a sacrifice and tear open the chest of sacrifice. The blood oozes out. It flows like a Red River and wets your hands and feet. Read the blood and letters are inscribed with killing. (Ali, 34).

Ajax: ... Learn the truth although it is too late. It is a luxury that suits artists and not leader. Regret is the folder of writers but not of leaders. (35)

Through the entire conversation between Hades, Zeus, and Ajax, Ali is trying to explain the corruption of the government, the horrors of the war, the lies spread by the leaders to take away the personal freedom from the people, demolishing their individuality, and run the state in a way that they want. Through the words of Ajax, Ali is directly communicating with the audience. Ali has developed the conversation in a way as if he is trying to wake up the audience and tell them what is important for their freedom and to preserve peace. The idea presented in his conversation shows that the government lies to its people and the whole idea of the war is only limited to violence and injustice. Therefore, the people need to understand the truth and its importance to earn their freedom to preserve peace. As Ali's characters yearn for change, there is another aspect to their yearning, freedom. Freedom here does not imply that the characters aim for a collective freedom, they all desire a freedom of self or "individual freedom", the freedom to make decisions and move in life without. Freedom can be described in three ways as Toniatti explains "The Concept of Freedom in Bakunin's Anarchist Thought and Its Relevance in the Context of Future Space Travel and Exploration"

- Freedom can be seen as the uninhibited expression of vitality, closely tied to the well-being of the organism and pleasure, in alignment with hedonistic theories.
 - Freedom is also the exercise of free will and the ability to choose, contingent upon the simultaneous existence of multiple motivations and possibilities. Criticism is directed at the concept of freedom of indifference, which reduces freedom to arbitrary randomness.
 - Another perspective views freedom as the manifestation of rationality, where choices are driven by reason and directed towards rational objectives. This aligns with Kant's postulate of practical reason and is associated with the moral will. (2)
- By these three definitions, it is evident that freedom is not merely a physical

attribute, it is a metaphysical one as well. The absence of these freedoms results in the physical and metaphysical oppression of an individual, thereby reducing the person's sense of agency, their personal desires and hence contributing to mental chaos. Bakunin holds the view that freedom is the "supreme end of history"; each notable struggle, event and personal development that has ever happened in history was formed for the pursuit of freedom. It is, in fact, the scion of humanity. The universalization of freedom, according to Bakunin, signifies the social embodiment of human essence, where true individual freedom inherently transforms into collective freedom. This concept views freedom as the definitive and universal aspect of human identity. Contrary to the prevailing idea of an original natural freedom predating society's formation, Bakunin rejects this myth, asserting that freedom is sought not at the beginning, but at the culmination of history. He contends that isolated individuals cannot grasp freedom unless recognized and acknowledged by others.

Individual freedom is a catalyst for collective freedom; when one galvanizes themselves and transforms their path for good, it sparks off a cascade event. Social change does not happen in a vacuum, it is an entire process. Wole Soyinka echoes similar to this idea: the "self-discipline" which comes from "self-knowledge", and which is "the greatest Guarantee of human will and freedom" The realisation of individual freedom is a transformation, and as result can be a catalyst for social change. In *The Last Metaphor*, the realisation that Jugnoo has is driven by the guilt of his inaction; he did not do anything to stop the death of the two boys. The guilt became a catalyst for deeper introspection; as a result, Jugnoo understands how his individual freedom has been curtailed by a society that considers him and his like an outcaste, and by the state whose sole purpose is subjugation and corruption. Ali seeks to drive that sense of individual freedom, and in doing so help drive a collective social change.

Ali's social vision is anarchist; he believes that change cannot come unless one undo the physical and metaphysical binds of arbitrary laws that hold them down. Parallels can be drawn between Ali and Wole Soyinka, because in essence their social vision is the same. The universal impact of his plays is mostly attributed to his use of satire, yet an undercurrent of compassion is evident in his writings. Ali like Soyinka, seeks transformation too. Through his plays, he critiques and lays bare the issues that plague his people, forcing readers to confront their own social complacency. Soyinka idealises primordial culture for its apparent absence of socio-economic divisions, viewing it as a liberating force. He opposes restricting ideologies, proposing for an "endogenous" society based on a "ritual archetype," in which people habitually defy dominant ideas to serve their communities.

Soyinka sees the current issues as the result of being confined inside certain ideologies, and proposes a remedy based on reviving primal culture and elevating humans to a "fourth stage." He emphasises the value of "tragic" or "ritual" theatre as a means of negotiating liberty and deconstructing ideologies, translating Nietzschean nihilism into a social, revolutionary strategy. His penchant for "circular" and "metaphysical" creativity indicates a desire to escape the restrictions imposed by the dominant social, economic, and political order on African intellectuals throughout colonialism and neocolonialism. (Walunywa 24)

The "metaphysical creativity" in question is amply illustrated in Ali's plays, where he uses his characters' angst and agony to project his anarchist idea; break the bonds that make thought and individual freedom captive. *The Last Metaphor* is an exercise of gradual realisation for Jugnoo and Banka; the ideologies that are prevalent in society hold individual freedom back; they are a driving force of subjugation. A similar facet can be seen in Edward Bond's plays as well. A noted British playwright, Bond explores the intricacies of the class divide, the norms and ideologies that plague the common man. In his play, *The Restoration*, Bond explores the ideologies that give rise to "unjust and violent cultures. Bond future states that "Art is the confrontation between justice and law and order". It is inherent here that art can create awakening in the soul of anyone who can recognise it. For Bond "what happens in society has identifiable cause and the theatre should disclose them objectively." (samiul haq nazki, 20). Bond uses sociology to deconstruct society and his characters. To him, freedom of expression only comes with portraying the gross and the injustice. Much like Soyinka, who states that he wants to smear "the faces of... the audience ... in the sewer of their material existence,". Bond's social vision is therefore one that seeks to strip the oppressive structures that govern the people as a whole.

It is obvious that Ali's characters in his play come from a mysterious yet traumatic background, fight against oppression, and experience a mysterious ending, yet they provide inspiration and awakening to the audience. Ali starts his play with death and chaos and at the end, he gives the solution of love to be the source of transformation in society. Additionally, Ali writes in a way that shows that anarchism is not just a theory but a mindset, and the central trigger to this mindset is political injustice and impatience. He writes to present that anarchism is not viewed as a doctrine that unleashes a war to win; it is a continuous form of liberalism in society which nourishes individualism, and it will continue to be the same no matter what form the world takes in the future. Ali in his plays has combined the socio-familial aspects of class struggle and class exploitation because of domination and in the name of state authority. *The Last Metaphor* represents some social

aspects while *The Odyssey* reflects the impacts on the familial structure, yet Ali's plays do not end in pessimism. There is a ray of hope that change in the landscape of Pakistan which is inevitable but not impossible. Death brings a new awakening in *The Last Metaphor* just like the prevailing infection can be healed in *The Odyssey*. Ali's theatre is a departure from the theatre of adaptation that is very prevalent in the literary landscape of Pakistan.

Usman Ali's theatre takes inspiration in form and content from Edward Bond keeping it more realistic, breaking new grounds by highlighting such segments of society that were previously at the backburner in theatre. Ali combines the fright and characters' acts believably but there remains a mystery entangled. His characters are motivated by an inexplicable background that is revealed to the audience in layers. Ali's plays are a form of resistance and dissent; he decries state policies, corruption and the state of the masses in Pakistan. Ali's dramaturgy speaks for a society in process of change is evident in his writings. His works address audiences enduring transformation via rational action, emphasising that human nature intrinsically opposes evil and destruction. Ali believes in reflecting diverse facets of human existence, arguing that theatre is inextricably linked to continuous global human relations processes. Ali's fascination with issues like war and violence, particularly its linkages to human interactions, can be seen throughout his plays. He dives into the complexity of human nature and society institutions, demonstrating how these components lead to both conflict and harmony. His cautious optimism serves him well as a playwright. While he understands that individuals are not flawless and that society regeneration is a lengthy and difficult process, he is determined to demonstrate the power of individual acts motivated by dissent, rage, and protest. Thus, he continuously emphasises the importance of consciousness and action in his plays, interweaving thoughts and actions as a recurring motif. He covers big themes, concentrating on the future of society and the possibilities for constructive change via collective and individual efforts. Ali's dramatic style is comparable to Bond's theatre, in which violence is a society issue rather than a theatrical technique. He connects societal violence to larger social concerns, hoping to shock viewers and raise sociopolitical consciousness. His plays' framework emphasises the interaction between individuals and society, reflecting the type of society they live in. Ali feels that the true issue is the failure to tackle societal problems, which might have serious implications. He claims that theatre should inspire people to believe in their ability to impact social change. Ali thinks that by discussing these concerns on stage, he would provoke critical thought and urge his audience to take action against injustice.

Ali's dramas are mostly about the truth of our life, breaking through cultural clichés and showing some of the facts onstage. His characters either support or oppose an oppressive regime. For example, "The Odyssey" and "The Last Metaphor" depict the conflict between state-imposed oppression and individual freedom. People who follow the rules are more likely to be aggressive because authority empowers them. Ali contends that a reasonable society can only be accomplished via morally sound individuals who fight the harsh system, whether silently or aggressively. In *The Last Metaphor*, Juggnoo's silent protest contrasts with Telemachus' open disagreement and wrath in *The Odyssey*, which emerges as terrorism. Ali's revolts are acts of rebellion rather than full-fledged revolutions, with the goal of sparking opposition and paving the road for a more just society. Ali's characters represent the numerous ways people might reject oppressive regimes, whether via silent disobedience or aggressive revolt. This dichotomy emphasises the complexities of resistance and the various forms it may take, emphasising the need of both silent and overt acts of defiance in bringing about societal change.

He takes back the narrative from the elite and centralises the everyday man in his plays. As per Barbara Harlow, resistance in literature cannot serve objectivity, and it is a cultural form of resistance it has to portray the wrongs in the brightest light. One cannot afford to be apolitical while decrying atrocities. As the Palestinian poet Marwan Makhoul writes and quoted by Tracy Abell in her blog *Palestinian Poetry*:

“In order for me to write poetry that isn’t political.
I must listen to the birds.
and in order to hear the birds
the warplanes must be silent.”

Literature is the ideal medium for resistance since it shapes ideas and immortalises them. In many ways, Ali’s works depict resistance and dissent, and his characters are in one way or another resistance fighters against the socio-economic tyrannies. As the commoners of Ali’s stage are trying to resist the socio-economic and political forces that are robbing them off better lives.

CHAPTER 4

ABJECTION AND ITS ROLE IN ALI'S DRAMATURGY

This chapter covers the analysis and discussion of findings extracted from the collected textual data. The researcher discusses the element of 'abjection' in Usman Ali's plays in different forms. Moreover, the researcher attempts to relate Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982) in social setup as secondary data to support the arguments and answer the second research question, that is, how strategically the concept of abjection unfolds in Ali's plays? The researcher has selected the most relevant text from Ali's plays to discuss the idea and theme of abjection emerging in his writings.

4.1 Abjection: The Workings of Disgust and Horror

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in *The Powers of Horror* traces a strong relationship between the environment and the behaviour of humans. The theory explains that the 'repulsion' felt by humans is a central bodily mechanism that 'determines' the human behaviour and reaction toward the circumstances (Tyler, 29). In other words, it is fair to say that the phenomenon of abjection is similar to the feeling of disgust. Both 'abjection' and 'disgust' are triggered by a stimulus from the outer world, and they become the source of 'rejection'. The conceptualisation of abjection takes place in the psychoanalytic framework of humans and results in rejection in the mind towards the occurrence of a particular object which transforms into disgust towards different phenomena later in life.

It is essential to begin with the dictionary meanings of "abjection" and "disgust". According to Merriam-Webster, abjection is defined as "low or downcast state; degradation." Disgust is stated as "marked aversion aroused by something highly distasteful: repugnance". Having these definitions in mind serves a clear purpose; it highlights how, in Ali's plays, these two concepts operate. To understand how he does it, it is important to understand the process of writing and its relationship with the writer.

Abjection has predominantly undergone examination within the realm of visual arts and has found expression through performance art. However, the realm of performing arts has yet to fully engage with this concept. The 1990s witnessed a plethora of writings,

discussions, and exhibitions in the United States and Europe, which arguably shaped and occasionally scrutinised the notion of 'abject art.' Often referencing the aesthetics of filth, obscenity, and decay through the display of bodily substances such as excrement and urine, abject art is commonly explored through psychoanalytic discourses that highlight the visceral mix of repulsion and attraction evoked by these artworks. (Georgelou 25)

There has to be a dissolution of what separates the art from the viewer; it has to shock and jar the viewer to the point that they feel "called upon" to act. The dissolution of artistic boundaries, as consistently asserted and witnessed by artists, art critics, art scholars, and philosophers, can be characterised as a shift towards performativity. Whether in the realms of art, music, literature, or theatre, the creative process is now often actualised as a performance. Artists are moving away from traditional methods of creating static works of art and are instead focusing on producing events that engage not only themselves but also encompass the participation of observers, listeners, and spectators. Consequently, there has been a fundamental change in the conditions governing both the production and reception of art. (Fischer-Lichte 22) The abject is such that its representation and portrayal arouses the players to metaphysical chaos. It makes them confront the baseness of human nature and calls into questions their comfort zones.

According to Kristeva (abjection in a person creates a sense of 'revulsion' and 'horror'. Ali's plays show the abjection and connection of humans to their animal origin. His characters are repulsive to each other, just as animals are considerate about their territories and are repulsive to intruders. This is evident in his play *The Flute*: "I think a parasite living off me for the last ten years. You are a snail, and you gave birth to this crocodile... crawl like a crocodile." (Ali 76)

In these lines, the disgust and repulsion of the character against one another is represented in animal imagery. Abjection is considered as the element that 'disturbs identity system or order' as it has no respect for boundaries, identity, rules, and position. (Kristeva 130) This element is also elaborated in Ali's play *The Flute* in more details. Throughout the play, there is clear abjection of the character and profession of Meerasi, a slur used for someone who belongs to a lower social class whose traditional and hereditary profession is singing and dancing. Even those who are friends and family of the entertainers mock them with the title of Meerasi and there are taboos to protect their notion, boundaries, and communities. Abjection is what society uses to cover up their ambiguity. This is what Ali has tried to highlight in his play *The Flute*:

You are a Meerasi²⁷. (hateful word for entertainers)

Who cares about dholki? no one... I found it lying on the heap of trash.

Three slippers around every corner. Wow, what a Meerasi... have you seen such a Meerasi? Till then she does not speak with me. She says she does not want to live with a Meerasi, so weak, so weak...

I always hated the Meerasi, I never wanted to be his wife... (Ali 78-83)

The lines demonstrate the hatred and disgust towards the *Meerasi*. He is not with some physical or mental disability, but his profession is culturally unacceptable. There is no radical explanation for why people call entertainers *Meerasi* and why they have this disgust and disrespect bound to this profession. There is not even a threat that is posed to the public by being a *Meerasi*. On the contrary, the profession allows people to enjoy music and be happy and get entertained during events such as a wedding, yet due to abjection from the society, the profession itself is acknowledged as a perpetual danger. In one of the lines in the play it is mentioned that *Only a Meerasi talks about the past...* (Ali 100-101). Ali is trying to communicate with the audience that the job of an entertainer is to bring music and beat the drums on the memory of the past. Music is associated with joy and freedom. On the other hand, Abjection is the process of mourning an object that has been lost or always already been lost and the object becomes repression in the mind. Since, the job of the Meerasi is to bring about those feelings and emotions which are connected with the loss. People hate him for no clear reason, feel disgusted towards his existence and feel ashamed to adopt that particular profession. The music brings forth feelings of joy and helplessness and loss. The people who listen to the Meerasi want to dance with joy, they want to experience the freedom of grieving their loss without constraint or social pressure. Which is why the Meerasis are marginalised due to prevalent ideology of 'abjection'. According to Grosz, there are three kinds of categories in which abjection is expressed in the form of disgust which are abjections for food, for bodily waste, and sexual difference. (78). These categories were later divided further to explain the vulnerability of the human mind, body, and desire. However, categorising these elements was important as they determine how primal vulnerability of the body is triggered by stimulus from three categories (Grosz 38).

²⁷ A derogatory word for entertainers, often used in rural settings in South Asia

Thus, the feeling of disgust towards identity and the sexual difference is dramatized in Ali's play *The Flute*. First Orpheus's wife is charmed by him for being an artist and later due to the taboos of the society she subjects him to abjection and her repulsiveness is shown when she cheats on him with Hades who is a man of better reputation:

Randia: You do not have a heart; I wish you were a man. (Randia and Hades continue kissing) (Ali 112)

Ali's disgust and abjection are presented through the character Randia (extended word for Whore). Although his protagonist is named Orpheus and the antagonist is named Hades, he named the wife of Orpheus as Randia instead of Eurydice because in Ali's play the wife of Orpheus is not seduced by another man; she chooses him on her own. Unlike Eurydice she lacks character and justice. She was not lured by some magic or Pluto-like power in the story of the original Orpheus and Hades, but she rather leaves her man because of the taboos of the society and just because she wants more. Ali's abjection is, therefore, pretty clear in the representation of his characters. He demonstrates rejection through his character Orpheus who has had enough of the society and the unjust behaviour of his lover:

Why are we ending as lovers? What happens at the end is important. Why not Begin? Disgusting! Orpheus every trick is the last trick. How ironical. What are you waiting for? For end. Disgusting... we will be off the stage. Disgusting.

HOOOOOOOO ... Disgusting. For what are we waiting? Disgusting. It is not titanic... Disgusting. (Ali 115)

It has been noted that the word 'Disgusting' is repeatedly used in the protagonist's last speech where it has been used almost six times consecutively. This repetition has been used by Ali to intensify the element of abjection in his play. While considering that these lines were the last word from the protagonist, show that the last word of the writer for the society is his disgust toward their norms and ways. 'Disgusting' here has been used in a way that it almost creates a rhythm for the reader so that even after completing the play the audience, as well as the reader, may forget what happened in the entire play but they will always remember the ending which ended with abjection. The same element of disgust and animal instinct has been demonstrated in the play *The Breath* where the protagonist shows his repulsiveness towards the man and the food equally:

Raja: He lived like a snail ...Bring the fucking tea. (Ali 26)

In the aforementioned lines, Raja is not just disgusted by others, but he has no respect for anyone around him. Using such words for food and people alike show the intensity and amount of hatred is gathered in the man. It is the result of the social injustice and constant neglect from the society as well as from his family. Ali has shown this kind of behaviour in a man who is rather educated and civilised as compared to the rest of the society. Since he belongs to the middle class and his behaviour is outrageous, it makes the readers think about the imbalance in the behaviour of the extreme classes. His attitude determines the extremes in the attitude of the higher and the lower class.

Heer: He said his body must not be buried until people start building a theatre and if buried only Gulsher, his friend, will bathe his body. (Ali 28)

The lines present the idea of how much Kallu was disgusted by society. Even in his death he was in revolt and refused to go by the norms. According to the Islamic rituals, on death, the body needs cleansing to enter the next world and the family members give the last bath to the body. However, Kallu has this view that his family and the people responsible for his last bathing are 'disgusting' and 'polluted'. He does not want his dead body to be affected by that pollution so, to confirm his clean death, he wishes his purification to be done by his only friend Gulsher, whom he believes as his equal and pure.

There are certain complexities and complications in his plays; however, the dialogues are quite simple, and they present the relationship of different humans with each other. He has simply turned the real-life experiences into dramatic forms to make the reader feel the real-life situations. Most of his plays including *The Prisoner*, *The Breath*, and *The Flute* have the element of shock and horror and the characters behave accordingly which shows the intention of the writer to wake up the audience as if the writer has something important to tell them. As demonstrated in his play *The Prisoners* Ali writes:

The sound of the clock ticking continues throughout the play. The choral chant of the crowd from the outside. A loud drumbeat accompanies the choral chant of the crowd throughout the play...hay hay...Mandi Bahauddin police station... shame... shame. Shame... (Ali 16)

The opening is a shock for the audience, and it continues throughout the play. Some critics might judge that the lifetime of shock and horror-dependent play is very short. The reason is that the shock is the main attraction for the audience and the drama itself lacks the

character. However, whether the shock element is successful or not it certainly takes the audience to the immediate effect that the writer is looking for. With such an introduction of shock, the audience is dragged into the corresponding reaction and that is the only way in live theatre that can produce the reaction in the audience that the writer has intended (Botting 23).

According to Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982), theatre should always have that unique power that can disturb the audience by having that material that makes them question their ideas and values (Pammenter 92). Thus, Ali has been successful in presenting his rejection of society and giving an insight to the audience with the element of shock and horror as an aspect of abjection in his plays. It was mentioned earlier that disgust emphasises rejection and that rejection is specifically targeted toward foods, bodies, and sexual differences. Darwin argued in his book *The Expression of the Emotion in Man and Animals*, that disgust can be referred to as the opposite of the pleasure which is mostly the gut response of an individual where a human is repulsive towards certain types of food, and the term at that time was known as 'core disgust' (Rozin et al 23). The concept Darwin related to disgust was expressed in universal terms and its effect was understood in the same manner (295)

However, with time, the idea evolved from general meaning toward the well-being of humans, and it was understood in terms of behaviour which ensures the security, purity of the organisms by avoiding whatever is toxic, foul and dangerous. Sometimes, the food involved in the assessment is not toxic but lacks virtue and can cause contamination to the soul of the humans. In this way, the idea evolved further, and disgust associated its connections with behaviours and ideas which are toxic to humans in the sense of behaviour and virtue. Ali's plays are an example of how disgust is not just a gut or core feeling but is also the sense of repulsion towards ideas and language that go beyond food. It is represented by ideas and impressions that people make and the way those impressions surface the bodies of humans. The best example is demonstrated in the play *The Prisoners*, where Rustum begs Sohrab to not "taint his tongue". Sohrab was speaking of Veera as a "savage" eliciting the remonstrance from Rustum. (Ali 26)

Here the sense in which Rustum says, 'do not taint your tongue' does not mean that he would contaminate his tongue by putting dirt or rubbish on it, but it is rather representative of the idea. Here Ali has used contamination in an ethical sense; this type of contamination reaction is known as psychological contamination (Rozin et.al 23). This also tells the readers that disgust is not necessarily related to ingesting toxic material but

considering something to be disgusting and toxic has very much to do with simple contact and that contact can be ideological or verbal also.

The way Ali has used the sense of disgust in his plays can be understood as mentioned in the studies of Mary Douglas. She argued that the feeling of disgust is also cross cultural where one cultural might consider an object to be clean in disposition whereas some other culture might consider it to be dirty and disgusting. Her findings on the subject were instrumental and she discussed the reasons why people judge certain objects' behaviours or people to be disgusting. She further argued that disgusting is not necessarily a lack of cleanliness, but it includes hierarchies of social norms and ideas which create a sense of purity among different entities. (Douglas 130). A few examples from daily life in Pakistan are colourism (white colour is associated with beauty and purity of race), the idea of a "virtuous widow" who keeps herself "pure" after her husband's death. Thus, it is argued that crossing boundaries create ideological pollution which is considered disgusting in the case of humans. Moreover, such ideas beyond the boundaries are what create a distortion among the observer and destroy his relationship with the object.

Furthermore, the sense of hanging in a limbo that is not quite defined also creates a sense of disgust/abject among the humans. When the idea is applied to the cross boundaries of the culture then humans feel disgusted towards a situation where they are hanging in between two classes and cannot decide what is their accurate positioning in the society. This is how abjection and disgust have been used by Ali in his play *The Prisoner*. Rustum and Sohrab discuss how they are "hungry", but it is not hunger, it is "fear." They discuss how they are "not afraid", not "killers", "thieves" and "gangsters":

Sohrab: We have not beaten anyone.

Rustum: Yet we are brave (Ali 68)

In the above-mentioned lines, Rustum is the one who is clear about his position in society and Sohrab is struggling to find where he lies in the entire situation of violence around him. In many instances, Sohrab tries to address the people outside the station in bad language and Rustum stops him by saying that 'they are not like them' which clearly defines the boundaries of the characters and explains their resentment and repulsiveness toward each other. On the other hand, the common public is disgusted by the police to such a point that they want to burn the police station to get rid of the societal pollution that they believe is surrounding them:

Rustum: They are afraid of those outside.

Sohrab: Pity, pity, pity.

Rustum: They will set fire to the police station. (Ali 50)

In this chaotic situation, the characters are expressing abjection, and they are being the target of the abject at the same time. The abjection of the prisoners is towards the violent public and the bad policemen, and they are being the target of the abject by the common public and the police. The abjection Rustum and Sohrab towards the common public is what is keeping them safe from the violence of the public and the abjection of the public towards police is what endangers their lives and the lives of others. Hence, the situation in which abjection is represented in the play also supports Kristeva's (1982) perspective of how abjection protects and endangers the existence of humans. In the aforementioned passage, the prisoners are struck with horror and do not want to engage with the citizens who are causing chaos (burn the police station). It is not just fear; there is a certain degree of the horror of life involved in it. According to Kristeva (1982), the writers who engage with abjection, work quite a lot with it, they imagine the logic in objection, project themselves into the situation, interject it afterward and as a result of it come up with a language style and content. The researcher has focused on the element of the abject in the writings of Ali, it has been noted that Ali's writings speak of horror, political chaos, cultural vision including a lot of violence, and anti-Semitism which needs to be understood as a symptom and it brings out the horror and the fascination of psychotic tendencies and violence.

The idea of disgust is combined with a certain degree of horror and fear and, known as 'fear-imbued disgust' (Miller, 28) which can create horror. Miller (1998) further argues that fear causes a person to flee away, and horror does the opposite. Therefore, horror that is caused as a result of disgust, creates an inability to move, and passiveness which means that the only option a person is left with is to face their horror. This phenomenon is explained as the inability of a person to run away because they are frozen in their tracks. Thus, as a result of horror, a person is unable to fight because the situation is threatening to them and it is disgusting; therefore, a person does not want to touch it or engage with it or encounter it (Miller 26). In other words, it is argued that the object of disgust becomes just like Sartrean slime, and the person does not want contact with it or be caught up with it. This explanation fits well with Kristeva's (1982) aspiration on her perspective of objection which is a horror discussion. *The Prisoners* vividly depicts the dual terror of the external threat from an angry mob and the internal turmoil within the prison. The inmates fear the

crowd outside, ready to kill them for their "innocent relationship." This crowd represents societal rejection and violence, embodying the abjection of the prisoners, who are seen as polluted and unworthy. Rustam and Sohrab, the central characters, express their struggles with societal norms and internal conflicts:

Rustam: We are not yet body mates. We are not yet soul mates.

Sohrab: We are prison mates. (Ali 118)

This exchange highlights their struggle to reconcile their feelings within the confines of prison and societal condemnation. Their relationship is fraught with internal and external conflicts, symbolizing the complex interplay between personal identity and societal expectations. Inside the prison, the characters grapple with their feelings for each other, torn between justifying their emotions and feeling disgusted by them. This internal conflict highlights the psychological abjection, as they question the morality of their relationship and try to reconcile their feelings with societal norms.

Rustam: Their hatred strengthens our love.

Sohrab: We want them to believe we are sinners. (Ali 118)

Prison serves as a powerful metaphor for abjection, encapsulating themes of confinement, exclusion, and degradation. The physical restrictions within prison walls symbolize the erosion of personal autonomy, reducing individuals to controlled entities. This violation of personal boundaries reflects the dehumanizing nature of imprisonment, stripping away personal agency. The prison is the medium through which they acknowledge their otherness and their disgust and horror at the baying mob outside. Disgust and horror is directed towards their existence, but not at what they are imprisoned for. In expressing their disgust for the outside, Rustam and Sohrab further underscore their alienation:

Rustum: They want our death.

Sohrab: And we dance.

Rustum: They are about to burn the police station.

Sohrab: And we clap.

Rustum: They are hungry with hate.

Sohrab: And we are filled with love. (Ali 69)

In the text excerpt given below, Sohrab tries to assuage the horror of his impending death through the promise of togetherness that was not granted to him and Sohrab:

Sohrab: Would they grant our last wish? (Ali,117)

Their last wish is to be buried together. This very question poses the belief that their last wish might not be accepted, that another descretion of self will be carried out. Their seemingly innocuous dialogue is an extension of societal disgust at human relationships that do not fall in heteronormativity:

Rustum: They do not allow two men to stand together.

Sohrab: They are blind to the Sufi tradition.

Rustum: Shamas Tebrez (R.A) and Rumi (R.A)..

Rustam: Ali Mian Hazoor and Hussain Mian Hazoor.

Sohrab: They are our models. (Ali 118)

In essence, prisons serve as tangible manifestations of societal efforts to regulate deviant behaviors, reflecting broader cultural anxieties and the exclusionary practices aimed at sequestering what is deemed perilous or undesirable. By viewing prisons through the lens of abjection, a nuanced understanding of the intricate social, psychological, and cultural dynamics underpinning institutional settings emerges, offering profound insights into the complexities of human existence within constricted and dehumanizing contexts. The dialogue between Rustam and Sohrab, rich with symbolism and emotional depth, provides a poignant exploration of love, identity, and resistance within the harsh confines of the prison. Abjection becomes the medium through which the disgust, the horror of their impending death and their alienation surfaces. This is one of the reasons why Ali's plays received appreciation. His writing style is similar to that of the British, American, and Russian writers; however, his characters convey the same disgust as they would be in an underdeveloped third-world country such as Pakistan. The writer has demonstrated the element of disgust not just for the environment, but he has also shown disgust for the norms, for the society, and even among the people for each other who are bound in a love-hate relationship (SOL). The discussion among the characters in his plays, especially in the times of loss, chaos, or revolt show how much these characters are frustrated and disgusted by their surrounding and the reader can feel their disturbed emotions even after the absurdity (senselessness and irrationality) of their behaviour. It is fair to say that the element of disgust and the desire of the characters to get rid of that disgust are rather

philosophical in Ali's plays. In his play, *The Prisoners*, for example, two policemen talk as under:

Beera: Rustum and Sohrab are sinners.

Veera: Cut their ears and nose.

Beera: Cleanse your village.

Veera: Punish them in public...Burn the police station...

Beera: Police is with the sinners.

Veera: Hang them in the market square...they are shameless...they are lunatics.

(Ali, 20-21)

The above-mentioned lines almost present the central idea of his play which is the 'segregation or alienation between the public and the authorities. It is why both of them are in revolt against each other. The two sectors of the society are disgusted with each other where each believes that the other group requires 'cleansing'. Throughout the play, it is seen that there is a constant disturbance between the police and the public, and the two groups are offended from one another to the point they believe that only burning each other alive is the only option to get rid of the problem.

According to Kristeva's theory, humans instinctively perceive the use of revulsion and language that depict filthy ideas as untrue and dirty, which is what causes them to doubt their ideology. This element of paradox is used in the theatre so that, people can use the difference between objects and feeling to define their feelings such as human vs. animal, joy vs. sadness, disgust vs. purity, real vs. illusion, and power and powerlessness. It is argued that this opposition in the theatrical plays is what helps people to understand the world and question their ideas which can be unsettling, but it invokes a potential among the humans to identify what they truly want.

Moreover, it is argued that creating this paradox and opposition in the plays makes the audience experience abjection which is 'life-affirming for them' (Kristeva 10). The main idea behind Ali's play is that he wants the people to feel the power of sufferings and the heaviness of being humans in a society that is full of corruption and broken norms. In Ali's play, society is always divided into two parts; the one which stays inside the rooms and is responsible for running the system, and the other on the streets who are deprived but also uncultured. By putting the element of disgust among the two parts of the society, Ali

has been able to create the experience of disgust for his audience and readers. The same disgust is represented in Ali's play *The Breath* in which as he writes:

(She spits on him and claps loudly, dances for a while and suddenly stops).

Rani: That is for your cowardice...

Raja: ...I curse you from the bottom of my stomach! May you rot in loneliness!

May you be raped by ten or twenty men! May you remain childless! ... (Ali 31)

These lines are part of the aggressive conversation between a man and his wife. The writer has aggressively used charged language considering it is for a couple who is in love and is married for years. This is how Ali has been able to portray the love-hate relationship between typical middle-class married couples by using absurdity. The kind of disgust presented between the characters forces the audience to dive deep into their ideals and feelings. Normally, they would avoid because such realities and aggressive use of foul language against each other itself is much more painful, humiliating, hurtful, and acute. The use of disgust and abjection brings out the universal fear about powerlessness, irrational behaviour, and fragility of relationships that makes the sense of the world for the people. However, it is argued by Sierz that real abjection in theatre is what violates the rules of the society and threatens the haven of the audience (as cited in Kovačeva, 2017). By using fear and disgust in his plays, it is further argued that Ali has urged the audience to bring about their typical reactions as they encounter abjection in their face. The basic theme of theatre is to turn the audience into judges who look, observe and judge actions on the stage and they have to practice till when they are forced to look away. If it is unbearable at some point for the audience, it means it has been successful in questioning their values.

If one were to explore disgust further in Ali's plays, it turns out that not only are the characters disgusted by their norms and surroundings, but the disgust also translates to their own self. In *The Prisoners*, Rustum talks about how he "infected her womb", meaning his mother, who has an HIV infection. He talks about how she hated him, and "suffering turned her to stone" (10, panel 4). This dialogue is indicative of self-disgust. Despite Sohrab's repeated protests in this particular passage, Rustum does not stop. He believes he was the cause of his mother's illness; his disgust at his involvement in it, however a figment of Rustum's mind, shows his disgust at his existence, one that "infected" his mother's womb.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, Abjection is defined as "sunk to or existing in a low state or condition: cast down in spirit: servile, spiritless; showing

hopelessness or resignation.” While disgust and abjection have distinct underlying structures, they are similar in that they make an item, emotion or a person seem inferior and unpleasant. These emotions alienate the subject from disagreeable objects, and they lengthen the distance between the subject and the abject. The movement of abjection in plays first started in Britain in the 1990s and it passed on to add more aesthetics and distinguish the modernist literature plays from that Elizabethan era plays. Modern British theatre uses both revulsion and abjection to highlight how disconnected humans are from nature, so making a statement about how alienating and isolating capitalism can be. (Vaziri, et al 235) Ali, being a realist playwright, is able to portray it correctly with his disturbing content. Through the characters ‘Rani’ and ‘Raja’ in his play *The Breath*, Ali has straightforwardly presented the reality of marriage in contemporary society. The words the characters use for each other in the time of the chaos are different from their early love for each other at the beginning of the play. By creating such a huge paradox in the behaviour of the characters, Ali has successfully presented that, pain is necessary and the idea of ‘perfect marriage’ is a false belief. By creating such sublime realities along with the experience of guilt, remorse, and cruelty, Ali has been able to create a real-life experience, complete with disgust morphing into abjection, for his audience by creating a combination of two opposites among the same people, to create the sense of painful delight. In his play *The Breath*, these lines demonstrate the intensity of disgust the characters hide for each other:

Raja: (Spitting in Rani's Face) I am sorry.

Rani: (spitting in Raja's face) I am sorry too.

Raja: (spitting again) Excuse me.

Rani: (slapping again) You are excused.

Raja: (strangling Rani with his hands he almost chokes her. Relaxes his grip and Rani falls and begins to gasp. Spits in Rani's face and dances around her for two minutes suddenly stops) I am the winner.

Raja: (Raja spits on her) F*** you off. (Ali 48-49)

The vocabulary used in these lines echoes the toxicity, violence, and disgust in human relationships. If observed keenly it can be noticed that the characters of Ali slowly turn from mild abjection to violence quick. The way Ali presents abjection and disgust in his character is disturbing for the audience and they spread like infections quickly, however,

this is one of many risks that Ali has taken, to make the audience experience unbelievable pain and humiliation by using abjection.

4.2 Abjection and Psychosis

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, psychosis is defined as “a serious mental illness (such as schizophrenia) characterised by defective or lost contact with reality often with hallucinations or delusions.” Psychosis is essentially a divide between the mind and reality, where reactions and behaviours are governed within the psychotic margins. Therefore, a psychotic may react with violence towards a harmless stimulus and are viewed as inherently harmful to normal society. For the purpose of this analysis, the researcher contends that Ali uses psychosis as a medium to project the abject towards the viewer/reader.

Despite being the purview of psychoanalytical theory, abjection has been extensively employed in the theatrical arts. Abjection has become a medium to portray the baseness of the human experience and emotions. The abject is not merely related to the physical, but to the mental as well. Psychosis can be projected aptly through the abject. Many playwrights in the 70s used overt portrayals of the abject to disturb the boundary between art and the viewer. Psychosis through the abject is a coercion, where the viewer is forced and manipulated to cross the boundary and feel disturbed by what they are viewing. However, the way that abjection is handled was critiqued by many scholars; Joseph Henry says that most playwrights worked with a “stable” definition of abjection and used it with reference to viscera and blood viscerally. In Ali’s plays however, he does not work with a stable definition of abjection; rather he explores other venues, namely mental chaos and psychosis as medium to portray the abject. He does not overtly deal with the hallmark symptoms of psychosis i.e. hallucinations and delusions. Rather, Ali works with the fracture between reality and fantasy within a psychotic mind. Parallels can be drawn between Ali and the works of Sarah Kane. Sarah Kane (1971 to 1999) was an English playwright noted for her plays that handle subjected such as redemptive love, sexual desire, pain, mental chaos, torture and death. Her play *4.48 Psychosis* was published shortly before her death by suicide in 1999. She was committed at the King’s College hospital after an unsuccessful suicide attempt. She repeated her attempt again, this time successful, by using her shoelaces and a bathroom cloth hook in the general ward bathroom where she was committed. She was 28 at the time of her death. Kane’s plays were characterised as “expressionist theatre”, with the use of extreme stage action the hallmark of her plays. *4.48 Psychosis* is widely regarded as her literary suicide note, with themes such as death, self-harm and mutilation

employed liberally throughout the play. For the purpose of correlating abjection and psychosis, the researcher feels that the Sarah Kane is worthy of regard. In the contending of abjection's linkage to psychosis, *4.48 Psychosis* serves as a subject of discussion. For Kane, the abject does not come from the outside, rather it comes from within. It can also be termed in psychology speak as "disassociation". In *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane blurs the lines between real, the fantasy and the consciousness: "My mind is the subject of these bewildered fragments" (*Ali 3*) The dissociation of the mind and body is an experience that many psychotics have identified during the course of their illness. To understand the mental turmoil that one goes through when they cannot comprehend reduces the sufferer to the lowest state, the very essence of abjection.

In *The Guilt*, the abject state is projected through the psychosis of Gamma, whose struggle with overcoming writer's block becomes unsurmountable. There are two notable instances that Ali has used to showcase the fracturing of the psyche and disassociation common in psychotics; the gradual breaking of the statue throughout the play, and the dancer that appears in between the dialogue. As Gamma types away, Billa proceeds to peel and work on a statue in Act Three. The peeling and breaking of the statue continues throughout the act, and only ends once the play ends. The description in the stage instructions is intricate; it feels as if Ali invites the reader and the viewer to witness the gradual destruction of the mind in the grips of psychosis:

Billa looks at Shera and then gazes at the head of the statue. He goes at back of statue and puts the tip of the nail at the centre of the rear part of the head and begins to stroke it. He begins to take out a knife and begins to peel the skin of the head (Ali 44)

An overt act of self-harm further illustrates psychosis:

"Billa bites his fingers and hands in disgust till blood comes out of his hands" (Ali, 47)

The persistent destruction of the statue is coupled with disassociation:

Shera does not respond. Throughout the dialogues of Gamma and Billa, he continues to stare, not at the audience, but in the space over above the head of the audience. (Ali, 56)

It has been established that the abject is often portrayed through the grosser mediums of blood and viscera. Ali establishes the abject through mental chaos and psychosis. Often, we see that mentally disabled individuals are seen through the eye of pity and disgust; they

are abject through the workings of the mind. The degradation that comes through society is secondary for the psychotics. They are rendered abject by their minds first.

The recurrent scene with the dancer is another facet that explores the actual process of disassociation; that is, the inner workings of the mind once psychosis takes hold. The movements of the dancer are intricate and repeated. However, the fluidity of her movements is interrupted by starts and stutters. She startles at the sound of crows (58), the sound of the drill (59), any sound that belongs to the outside world. Here Ali represents the normal trying to assert itself in the hallucinatory reaches of the psychotic mind. The outside sounds break the psychosis only momentarily before it reasserts itself. This state is disordered and fluid, a limbo of sorts. The dancer is disassociated, knows it and yet cannot bring herself under control. Thus, through the dancer's movements' Ali strives to show the abject through the lens of psychosis.

In *The Prisoners*, Ali employs psychosis in a subtle way to show his characters' abjection. While their physical abjection i.e. their abjection is very much apparent to the viewer, Ali uses subtle yet jarring reminders of their mental state to showcase how their abject also comes from within their minds. Rustum and Sohrab are as much a prisoner of their own minds as they are of the police station. While Ali does not make any overt mention of psychosis, he does make use of short, disjointed dialogue to show how disconnected his characters are:

Sohrab: I do not like the word hour.

Rustum: It sounds heavy.

Sohrab: What about minutes?

Rustum: It sounds lighter. (Ali 89)

Their worry is not focused entirely on their impending death; it is focused on other things, if they get a burial (90), or whether they get buried side by side (99). The prisoners have disassociated from their impending death, have accepted it and moved on to other matters, as much as their disordered minds let them. The use of the clipped, seemingly random dialogue serves to enhance the prisoners' mental suffering; their incarceration has left them unable to think about anything beyond a certain degree.

The researcher found out that Ali has amply used psychosis to underscore this character's abject state of mind and social standing. In *The Breath*, there are certain overt activities that may seem absurdity, but in fact they are the workings of a deeply disturbed,

abject and disassociated mind. Some of his characters such as Rani and Raja in *The Breath* provide an insight into how Ali has used their mental turmoil to portray their disassociation and abject nature. Furthermore, to create the sense of disgust and dejection, there is mentioning of those characters who do not appear on the stage; they are only mentioned by other characters to exaggerate their level of psychosis to the point of where characters face mental ‘collapse’ and destruction and revolt against cultural norms. The audience sees it as impossible to build any hope for the survival of those characters. The following lines from *The Breath* support the argument.

Rani: Kako ran wildly in the streets. Mad she was. Tearing her hair. No one has ever seen her hair. But she tore her hair and clothes. She ran naked through the streets. (Ali 56)

Here Ali makes use of the overt actions that psychotics are prone to committing when in the grip of it. They lose their sense of reality and of norms of acceptable behaviour. Ali’s characters are psychotic to a certain degree; they are abject by virtue of their disordered minds first and social status later. Their disordered thinking is a hallmark of their furthering fracture from reality.

Rani: (Slapping Raja) How is that?

Raja: Why did you slap me?

Rani: You speak a lot (Ali 52)

This is not a normal reaction to someone talking too much. In the face of Kallu’s death, Raja and Rani are rendered abject. Their normal responses are subverted, and they are in the grip of a type of psychosis in the face of their friend’s death. Despite Kallu’s impending burial, Raja and Rani continuously engage in absurdity; slapping and punching each other, dancing after putting on *Moulin Rouge* (58), cutting their hair. The abject has rendered them psychotic, their responses might seem perfectly rational to them, but they are in fact a hallmark of psychosis. This state is further exemplified when Raja and Rani both see Kallu after his funeral prayers have been announced (62). Hallucinations are an aspect of psychosis as well. Ali through his plays has explored psychosis through the abject in subtle ways. He has used images and themes other than the employment of blood and viscera. He has used mental processes to illustrate the abject nature of his characters. Ali’s abjection through psychosis is therefore not overt, it is the working of the common man’s mind rendered psychotic through the daily grind the person

undergoes. Ali implies that society has a collective psychosis; some mask it well, while the abject have no other choice but to experience it fully.

4.3 Abjection through Psychosis Induced Violence

People with mental illnesses have often been characterised and ostracized for being “violent”. Although there is moderate but reliable association between violence and mental illness, the link however is not fully established. One of the reasons why many researchers hesitate to link violence concretely with mental illness is the evidence that what may seem to be violence to the outside observer is in fact a perfectly rational response for the psychotic. They are essentially acting according to the prompts of their mind. For example, if the psychotic responds to a physical irritant like tight clothes with excessive gesticulating and protests, it is because the mind perceives the sensory discomfort as danger. In Ali’s plays, violence is shown as an aspect of the abject that is psychosis ridden. Violence is also a perfectly rational response to what the characters are undergoing.

People experience a deep metamorphosis when their intellectual limits and order collapse in the domain of the abject. According to Kristeva (1982), the disruption of one's identity and established structures, rather than a lack of cleanliness, is what gives rise to the danger of violence that characterises the abject. The presence of the abject provokes feelings of attraction as well as repulsiveness, which show themselves in bodily emotions such as nausea and terror. The despicable, although slightly recognisable, is still incomprehensible. According to Kristeva (1982), it is perverse because it subverts laws and conventions without explicitly rejecting or accepting them, instead twisting and corrupting them to undermine their legitimacy. In Kristeva’s semiotic aspect, the birth of the child is an act of violence itself. It is ripped from the mother and is born in blood and viscera. The sense of self of the child is then forced to acknowledge itself as a being apart from the mother. It is a quasi-psychosis, one that is fleeting in time, born from the mother’s abject through violence.

As per Fischer Lichte, violence in performance can also be interpreted by the audience as a critique of the state (Fischer-Lichte 16). Violence in theatre can be a medium of exploration of the atrocities that the state or any other entity imbued with power commits on those who are less powerful. The abject is born through violence, commits violence and is subjected to violence. It could be seen as a critical commentary on societal conditions that demand individual sacrifice, both self-imposed and imposed by external forces.

Therefore, in theatre, violence through the abject is not merely to shock and cause horror, although that is one major aspect. It serves as a catalyst for thought and creating analogies to the real world. The audience is witness to the abjection, then violence. They are forced to make comparisons, to understand what the artist is trying to say, and in doing so, are forced to confront what they are unwilling to look at closely. The actions of the actor can seem like psychosis. This is a rational association. Violence is associated with psychosis, as in they cannot control their responses to stimuli. However, violence in theatre is presented through action that are calculated to arouse discomfort and to showcase the dark side. The audience is therefore themselves violently forced to confront the abject.

According to Aracena, psychosis is shown in the characters to present the dark side of society through images to reflect upon the stereotypes. The presentation of mental illness in theatre is to shed light on the relationship between mental illness and violent behaviour (Aracena, 19). Ali has shown the psychosis in his characters to build a connection between violence and mental issues. This is a way to the confrontation of broken ideas in society which if left untreated can lead to chaos and menace which is onset of anarchism. It is argued that Ali's plays and the psychosis in his characters provide a drift from the exterior world into the interior world where the audience moves away from the physical environment of the play, into the inner psychological perspective, triggering higher thinking. His drift from the physical to the mental world is demonstrated in his plays in such a way that, his plays do not contain actions or stage directions in conventional means but in the verbal forms, where characters deliver the sense of psychological issues to the audience.

The tearing away of the fabric between reality and make believe is not gentle, it is violent. The abject resort to violence to feel, to understand what lies beyond the comprehension of their disordered mind. To quote Butler, abjection is an "exclusionary matrix"; therefore, the abject do not suffer their exclusion in a genteel manner. They profane, they shout, tear at their clothes, smear their viscera, in order to get past their disassociation. This concept of violence is amply portrayed by Ali in *The Breath*:

Raja: Scissors. (Rani takes a razor and Raja sits down. Rani begins to shave Raja's head while Raja sits with his hands straight ahead. Raja becomes completely bald. Raja plays her hand on Raja's head and looks at the fingers which are red with blood. She sucks her fingers. (Ali 61)

The violence shown in this text excerpt showcases abject, psychosis and violence

in one. Traditionally abject is represented through blood and viscera. Here Ali employs the same tactic albeit in a muted way. Ali's words are calculated to trigger a sense of misery and nausea in the viewer, along with the question "why?". This kind of violence is not easily palatable for the viewer. It is conducted in a perfectly rational manner. As stated before, the acts of violence that psychotic commits are often deemed rational responses by their mind. To make the readers and the audience feel the trauma, Ali uses his linguistic skills and creates instances where the overt action is lacking, yet the delivery of trauma and remembrance is there. In presenting mental illness, the writers have the option to put the experience into action and deliver intense and disturbing actions to the audience to witness the situation and feel the life of the traumatized.

Ali uses both the "rational" violence and overt violence coupled with abject elements to make the viewer uncomfortable. These excerpts given below are instances where overt violence is portrayed in *The Breath*:

Raja: (He goes on his knees and Rani comes near to kiss. He spits on her) F*** you off.

.....(spitting) I spit on your speeches. (Ali 21)

The above-mentioned lines make use of overt abject elements and violence that does not have the air of rationality; rather they portray disgust and immense anger. To spit on another person is an act of violence and discretion; Raja commits it in an act of psychosis where his rational mind is absent. There is another instance of intense violence:

Raja: A husband wants to help his wife. That is also a blessing. Come on take it. Let me become virtuous also. (Rani comes near, Raja holds her hand and throws her down and tightens her neck with the cable. Both fall and roll down.) A knock at the gate. Raja relaxes the grip and gets frightened. (Ali 37)

As discussed before in Abjection and Psychosis, the normal when intrudes in on the disordered mind renders it confused and lost and frightens it. Raja here is also confused and frightened, whether by his actions or by imminent discovery is not determined. After a detailed critical reading, it has been found that there are quite visible kinds of violence and strange madness in Ali's plays. The effects of violence in the plays can be understood from the perspective of Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982) and the phenomenon is demonstrated in different acts by the characters, their thought process, their language, and hatred or disgust towards each other. Although she has used a psychoanalytic framework

to theorise the effect of violence, however the perspective can be extended in the forms of linguistics and actions to explain the behaviour of humans in a specific environment and human responses towards that environment in terms of abjection which affects their personal as well as social life.

In *The Prisoners*, violence is not shown to directly affect the characters. It is an outside source, generated by the crowd baying for blood in the very beginning:

(A cell in a police station. Complete darkness

..... The choral chant of the crowd from the outside. A loud drumbeat accompanies the choral chant of the crowd throughout the play.)

Hiay. Hiay, Hiay, Hiay

Mandi Bahauddin police station

Shame, shame, shame

Mandi Bahauddin police station

Shame, shame, shame

We want

Rustum and Sohrab

We want

Rustum and Sohrab

Hiay. Hiay, Hiay, Hiay (Ali 44)

As Pakistan is, we are well cognizant with what a charged crowd can do. The death of two brothers in Sialkot and the lynching of a Sri Lankan national Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana ²⁸ in 2021 are both stark examples of what mob violence can do. Here Ali shows the collective violence that has affected the common Pakistani populace. Those who usually participate in mob violence are participating in something that escalates and goes beyond their control. It is a collective psychosis that grips the crowd and prompts them to violence. In the lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana, the factor was the indoctrination of the masses relating to blasphemy that prompted them to violence. The abject lies in the act of violence that arouses despair and disgust at its happening. The collective psychosis that prompts the violence is the abject that Ali has

used to create the atmosphere of being trapped and in despair. In Ali's world, the abject lies within (Rustum and Sohrab) and outside (The crowd).

The abjection in the words used by Ali shows the irrationality of the system, laws, taboos, stereotypes, and social norms that threaten the well-being of society and communities. In other words, the Abjection used in Ali's plays is a rejection of these things. The researcher argues that Ali's plays present the example of different aspects of abjection by demonstrating violence, immense physical or psychological sufferings, fear, disgust, horror, and multi-dimensional manifestations of abjection. These lines from *The Flute* are a stark example:

Orpheus: A fight took place, and they get that I caused the row. They put me down and shaved my head, moustache, and eyebrows. They were not barbers. They used shaving machines for the first time. The wound's still there. Then one of them shaved my eyebrows in the middle of the wedding (Ali 78-79).

The lines from the story of the man clearly present the details of humiliating a person which shows how violence is practiced. As stated before, the abject comes from both within and the outside. Orpheus is rendered abject by virtue of his standing and profession. The violence practiced on him is the abject by virtue of its ignominious nature. *The Flute* is replete with such acts of violence, not committed by Orpheus, but on him by others. His low social positioning makes him a target of those who seek some gratification:

(Hades tear the shirt of Orpheus and spreads it on the ripped drum)

Randia: F*** you too. Hades. You fucking Idiot. Where is your whistle? Why don't you blow it now? Come on slap me to stop shut. Spit at me. Say I am wrong. (Ali 80-115)

These instances of violence point towards the abject that exist in the characters' minds. Randia protests in anger against her status as a folk artist's wife. Orpheus struggles with coming to terms of this profession becoming a dying art form. Their anguish and status render them targets for violence. These characters are abject by virtue of their psychosis. Hades and Randia are in the grip of their own minds, and their anger and rage surfaces through violence. By using such vocabulary Ali has been able to have a critical approach toward society and present how much violence men are capable of. His works fall under the theory of abjection by Kristeva (1982) which has been a critical approach for the researcher to explore abjection in Ali's plays. When viewed under the lenses of Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982). it is noticed that the portrayal of violence in Ali's plays, the horror and the damage caused by violence, hatred, and disgust help the audience to

understand the deeper functioning of the society, the aesthetics around them, the culture and the politics. It is through the abjection of psychosis that Ali is able to bring the true face of the average Pakistani suffering in his writings.

It is argued that there are multiple manifestations and aspects of abjection which are part of the foundation of Ali's plays. He uses different forms of violence in his plays, or it can be said that his plays contain different levels and forms of abjection that create problems with the identity of the people, question the flaws in the system, uncovers the challenges of culture and religion, and present the dark side of the politics, law, and order. Thus, the researcher contends that Ali's plays graphically 'objectifies' and manifests violence as a type of psychosis through elements which are taboos such as exploitation of bodies, dead bodies, execution, humiliation, suicide, and beatings. He manages to rhythmically create the whole story to tell the audience that the suffering of the mind at the hands of the mighty is enough to render it disassociated and helpless, only capable of rage. Ali has critically represented violence to explain to the audience that no matter what part of the society, violence is an integral part of it. He represents the collective psychosis of a people enduring and trying to survive any way they know how.

In the light of the theory of abjection, it is noted that Ali used abjection on linguistic as well as the thematic level 'to eliminate all the characteristics of domestic plays' (Malone, 460). His plays present his struggle to find meanings and comprehension of violent society so that he can speak against the wrongs of the world. Through his characters and strong use of metaphors, he presents abject actions and elements. Moreover, he has creatively moved away from conventional writing rules and drifted into imagery and symbolic and semiotic order. It is noted that Ali follows a proper structure and a pattern that does not conform to the rules and the natural style of play writer, but rather dives deep into abjection and verbal demonstration of unconventional writing. It is also noted that, before any action takes place in his plays, there is a preverbal hint hidden in the statements of the characters which guides the reader to the manifestation of the abject actions. With the support of vocabulary, the thought process of the characters, and their actions, Ali has been able to sow the seeds of conflict, violence, disgust, hatred, existential crises, and the love-hate relationship of humans in his plays.

4.4 Abjection and Identity; Self and Otherness

While abjection is often characterised as "downtrodden", it also holds another meaning in "alienation" and "otherness". Those who are downtrodden belong to the lower socio-

economic classes or are part of a cultural facet where they are denied much of their rights, like the folk performers in Pakistan reduced to a slur, or the Dalit social class in India. These factions of society are downtrodden not merely on the basis of their economic designation, but also on their otherness. They are denied their rights and considered to be second class citizens. They are the “others” to the “respectable” middle class with their respectable surnames. Similarly, the middle and upper middle classes are the “others” to the “elite”, who cannot comprehend the middle-class way of living. It is an existential crisis; neither here nor there. The otherness is a limbo, where identity and self-war with societal perceptions and henceforth cause mental chaos.

Kristeva’s (1982) theory of abjection has been invoked by the researcher because it gives a constructive view for thinking about the authors whose works demonstrate existential or self-crisis. Moreover, the way she discussed abjection provides explanations for the readers to learn new ways of investigating ‘self’ in the text written by the authors in times of unknown psyche and conflict in interior self. The abject is a placeholder for the pre-Oedipal stage before the mirror stage, occupying the space between awareness and the unconscious according to Lacanian theory. At this point, the baby starts to express its uniqueness by separating from the mother and joining the symbolic order. When viewed via Kristeva's perspective, the abject represents the rejected (m)other, which is essential for the mirror stage of self-establishment. It casts doubt on the self's validity by stressing difference from what it isn't rather than self-discovery. Identity is constantly under danger from the abject, who by emphasising the Other and upsetting the sense of coherence, has the capacity to completely destroy the self. Kristeva links abjection to early attempts, prior to linguistic autonomy, to break away from maternal influence. Here identity is developing and highly circumspect. The abject is what that is discarded when self is developed, or rather, when identity of being is established.

In Ali’s plays, it has been noted that ‘self’ is the primary subject of discussion where the characters go through a different set of problems in the play to understand and to be understood. Identity is fluid and dynamic, it is a state of limbo. It is too foreign to be called home, and too comfortable to be other. Thus, Ali’s characters while staying cognisant of their otherness also have made an odd peace with it. In *The Prisoners*, it has already been established that the characters communicate via broken sentences to give a sense of their mental state. They constantly flit from one idea to another. Their self is as broken as their dialogue. However, they do understand that they are not what society terms them to be. They are accepting of it, but they also know that this is not what they are. Their

remonstration against the identity that is foisted on them is resigned:

Rustum: What have we done?

Sohrab: Love each other.

Rustum: Have we done dirty things to each other?

Sohrab: Please do not say that.

Rustum: We liked to stand together.

Sohrab: And they called us.

Rustum: How can they call us by that dirty word?

Sohrab: When we are not least like them? (p 66)

Through the status as prisoners and perhaps their sexuality, which is only hinted in the play, the characters are rendered abject, and their identity and self is circumspect in the eyes of society. It is not clear why they are jailed, but from the above excerpt it can be inferred that they are jailed for the crime of homosexuality. Rustum and Sohrab know what they are, who they are, yet they are rendered in limbo, neither here nor there in terms of their identity. They are “bad”, but they know that they in fact are not bad.

Ali's characters are speaking in a way that presents their self-expression; caused due to primal repression and leading them to utter hopeless and murderous intent or self-destructive actions. It is argued that these characters are subjected to fatal attractions. Ali wrote his plays during the period when there was an increased focus on self-discovery and understanding of inner purpose. It was the era where the writers were progressively seeing ways to understand the mind and its drives and to examine the limits of erotic discourse. Therefore, Ali tries to explore the applications of abject love through dangerous potentials exploring human beings and their existential crisis.

It is argued that the specific interest in the understanding of self, started with Rene Descartes's cogito in the *Discourse de la Method* (1637) and John Locke's *Theory of Tabula Rasa* presented in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). It was later seen that many philosophers and writers started writing extensively about the studies of mind and self-discovery. These philosophical underpinnings were later theorised as the most important form of understanding between relation of one's consciousness with unconsciousness discussed by Sigmund Freud and many other psychoanalysts.

Psychoanalysis discusses the radical understanding holy cultivated by the writers and humanists of renaissance era where none was the master of the field however what truly mattered was that the concealed matter was out in its expression and the unconscious which was previously repressed was expressed boldly and painfully through the representation of illness and hysteria, nightmare and fiction.

It is also seen that the way Ali writes his plays is very much similar to 18th-century writers who studied and comprehend existential crisis, the factors contributing it and the true nature of human beings making self-discovery. These were seen as an important topic of discussion and investigation in the literature. Ali presents his characters in a way where it can be seen that they are in a constant struggle with sensations and ideas. In this line, taken from his play, *The Flute*, it is noted that Ali presents the struggle of self with perception about oneself:

Randia: We were born interruptions. Perhaps interruptions in the great design as well we speak, we interrupt.

.....We are living interruptions ORPHEUS. (Ali 95)

Ali composed his plays in an environment where people are subjected to economic, political, and cultural chaos, and in the middle of that chaos his characters are subjected to change, individuality is expressed through their thoughts, and by using abjection they are carried deep into their 'self'. Ali has used the transformation of the characters which was used in the Romantic period where the characters are stuck in the crisis of self-centred, chaotic, and 'bewildered' closed territory, the kind of a place in which "*the self is struck with anxiety, not because of its relation to something else to its relation to itself*" (Klein125). Therefore, it is argued that Ali tries to uncover the dark dimension of the unconscious mind by making characters that are tormented and trying to seek knowledge of their hidden nature and impulses. Same is the presentation of existential crisis in the play *The Breath*:

Raja: What if we die together! Yes, we should die together...

Raja: one of my brothers died when I was growing inside my mother. She cried for nine months and after nine months I was born. I am my mother's mourning. I am she (Ali 45)

The phenomenon of self-discovery and the entire process is the result of inevitable tension and the inability to execute or cope with the inevitable problems of human

existence, death, and the journey to pursue and fulfil desires. Therefore, it is no wonder that Ali's plays have received such great recognition in the literary society because they sought out the philosophical edge of the self. In his plays, the poems sung or written by tormented and disturbed characters present important psychic pressures on their minds. In their own ways, the characters are trying to make sense of their inner turmoil.

It is evident in the writings of Ali that he tried to reach greater and more creative depths by presenting some inspiring artistic thoughts, including sensibility, self-expression, and psychological suffering concerning others. It is argued that Ali's plays are a window of art to examine self of characters and their collective deepest darkest fears, torments, and horrifying experiences. It is fair to say that his works are artistic genius with a deep sense of melancholy creating the essence of self-discovery that never leaves its readers. It is further argued that Ali's plays are dominated by internal desires which were described by Kristeva (1982) as 'abjection. After reading Ali's play *The Flute* it can be argued that Ali's focus is on the alienated self where he debates about the place of one person in the society searching for answers to several questions but most importantly *what is self?* The same element is seen in the ending lines of the play *The Flute* where the character says his last words which have no simple answers and lead only to more questions and incoherence in the minds of the audience and the readers. Questions such as:

What is more to see? What is remaining to be discovered? Have you not seen
seven days of the week? Thirty days of the month? Twelve months of
a year? Three hundred and sixty-five days? What more?
.....What more? Haven't you had enough? (Ali 115-116)

It is obvious that there is no stable answer for the questions raised by the characters, and they also show that there is no existence of stability in self. Instead, what is demonstrated in the play is that in between all the chaos 'self' is left somewhere behind. To exist, to experience consciousness is a struggle that requires countering ambiguities and the horror of the unconscious mind, the horror of death drive even in the most exclusive human experiences, connections, and separations. It is noticed that the way Ali joins together several different ideas reframes the discussion about the consciousness and brings together vague dimensions of the unconscious mind and expressing the hidden desires of human actions, a phenomenon which was also discussed by Freud and Kristeva (Zahavi 72).

Identity when viewed through Ali's lens is not just the domain of the mind, rather it is shaped by the perceptions, stereotypes and norms of society. Ali shows how his

characters are relegated, shaped and downgraded to societal perceptions despite them having their own identity and sense of self. One of the major aspects of Ali's writing is the dramatic presentation of society, social change and his concern with issues, including violence, class differences, war, poverty, anarchy, freedom, and injustice. The critical analysis of his plays has enabled the researcher to find out that Ali's plays are embedded with the elements of realism, rationalism, radical thoughts, and solutions. His development as an artist has made him grow into an individual with a strong political and aesthetic vision. After reading his plays it is argued that Ali has grown as a didactic and radical writer. Considering that he belongs to Pakistani society, it is fair to mention that his ideas are inventive, bold, and experimental. His theatrical plays include surreal fiction, realism, and Greek revisionism with a touch of restoration parody, librettos, and music.

There are several different forms of abjection used by Ali in his writings, yet the most common form used by him is the rejection of the norms of the society and the pattern of compromising the boundaries of self (Duschinsky, 725). As mentioned earlier, according to Kristeva's theory of abjection, the abject sense inside human minds help them to protect themselves, but it also endangers their existence. It protects because humans can express themselves and vent out abject through several different ways and it endangers because it compromises the safety of the individual boundaries and takes back the humans to their animal instinct. Thus, abjection in humans is demonstrated in two forms; one where the expulsion takes place (to abject) and the second where they are the target of abject (being abject). In Ali's plays, we see both kinds of abjection where the characters in the play are doing the action of expulsion and they are being abject.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, taboo is defined as "banned on grounds of morality or taste", while stereotype is defined as "a standardised mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment". These two definitions need to be clarified, since they might seem overlapping but are not. One arises from the other.

Taboos are the creation of societal perception. The Dalits of India are a classic example of how taboos function to marginalise and "other" an entire people. In conjunction with Kristeva, the abject is an othering of self, a limbo state. Any taboo prevents a person or a class of people enjoying their human rights. They are "othered" by the stigma that surrounds their identity and are persecuted for it. These people are the erstwhile "Untouchables," who were forced to live in areas and denied access to fundamental rights

including the right to property, education, and civic and cultural rights. Similarly, the Witch Trials of Salem are a historical example of how the cultural reservations against witchcraft and magic led to the widespread persecution of “canny” women, midwives and healers who had knowledge of herbs.

To better understand how taboos and stereotypes work in conjunction with the abject, it would be pertinent to address the “labelling theory.” Labelling theory is derived from the symbolic interactionism school of thought, which holds that a person's interactions with other people and the labels others give to them shape that person's sense of self. In the realm of the abject, it has been established that the abject comes from within and outside. From within comes in the form of psychosis and violence, while from outside comes from the perceptions, social processes and taboos. People from lower socio-economic classes are already suspect through their societal position. The thief is always the one who is poor, and the finger of suspicion will never be raised against any person who is from an advantaged class. Labelling theory explores these fundamentals of how taboos and stereotypes arise, in relation to crime and criminology of course, but Ali's characters have committed the “crime” of their being abject and of lower social standing. The taboo gives rise to the stereotype, the stereotype becomes the cause for marginalisation. The identity and self becomes warped in the weight of societal perception and othering; in which case, the perception begins to shape identity. It is an existential crisis that closely echoes Hamlet's most quoted dialogue:

“To be, or not to be, that is the question) (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1).

This scenario sketched above fits very well the character of Jugnoo in Ali's *The Last Metaphor*. Jugnoo is a gangster who cannot recover from the guilt of his being a silent bystander in the mob murder of two young boys. He cuts an abject figure despite his status as a criminal. Typically, criminals do enjoy some police protection but here too the intricacies of society come into play. Jugnoo is perhaps not high enough on the social status ladder that he can enjoy immunity from the police. He is reviled by his gang members and people around him alike. These lines highlight the circumstances of the stereotype that surround Jugnoo:

Banka: Everyone is laughing at you. Jugnoo the coward, Jugnoo the dog, Jugnoo the runaway

.....Jugnoo died like a dog in a police encounter.

Jugnoo: Everyone says this, and I cannot bear that. I wish I had no ears. The villagers spit on your name.

.....Everyone points fingers at me. The police takes me at night, beats me through the night and drops me at the door in the morning. (Ali 14)

These lines show how Jugnoo is constantly brutalised both by words and actions by his society. Jugnoo is humane, his suffering comes from the perceptions that shaped him. He is not what he has become through the force of circumstance and perception. Ali has imbued Jugnoo with a sense of his own self as separate from what he is socially. The stereotype that gangsters are inhumane and do not have sense of consciousness does not apply to him. Rather, he is shaken by traumatic events and seeks to make amends. Most of the play is taken up by his remembrance of the incident; he remembers it in detail, he remembers how afraid he was, and he knows he did nothing to help the boys. His excuse was that he was on the run from a robbery. He says to Banka:

Jugnoo: I had done violence, but I had never seen it.

.....Doing and seeing are quite different Banka. (Ali 20)

The stereotype of a cold heartless gangster with no moral compass does not hold true with JUGNOO. He is rendered abject by the memory of the two boys' death. He sees himself in them:

Jugnoo: I closed my eyes but when I opened them, I saw that my fingers resembled their fingers. In breathing we are all the same. (Ali,21)

Jugnoo's empathy at the death of the two brothers and their inaction does not fit the stereotype he has been moulded into. He is fully cognisant of how the world sees him, he knows what he is, but *who* he is, that question is answered throughout the play's development. Towards the end, the dead body that he is so fond of is revealed to be a canine. He cared for it as a way of atonement. Jugnoo's abject is his stereotype and the taboo of murdering and thieving, no matter that murdering and thieving at the higher levels of society are considered to be badges of honour. In Jugnoo's case, his socio-economic status plus his criminal history creates the othering of his self from the rest of society and his identity as a criminal is cemented. He is "labelled" as a criminal and therefore he must be, whereas the opposite is true.

As already established, labelling theory states that the labels associated with a person early on shape their identity and perception of self. The taboo around folk artists,

for example, leads to a stereotype of promiscuity and irreligiosity. Similarly, a child labelled as “deviant” early on in relation to his socio-economic class either rebels against it or internalises it. The classes, people of colour, people who already exist at the margins of society are the most frequent targets of stereotyping, and taboos are most frequently associated with them.

According to Kristeva, the abject is a human reaction and it happens when there is a mental breakdown that is caused by the destruction of the boundaries between ‘subject and self’ and ‘object or others’ (Tyler 80). Thus, abjection is a degenerated state of an individual where he confronts and questions other entities and collapses in spirit because of the difference of self and others. In simple words, the abject happens when the individual is unable to find their place in society and as a result, the individual is in a state of remorse, grief, confusion, and identity crisis. Ali has shown in his play *The Flute* that being an artist is a stereotype and the taboo in the society which leads people to the abject and show their disgust towards them. When the purpose of entertainment is fulfilled from them, they are marginalised for promoting taboo topics, disseminating vulgarity, providing inspiration, changing young mind sets, and dispersing novel ideas through their art. Ali’s characters present experiencing abjection on many divergent levels such as Kafka and Dostoevsky presented in their works. Ali uses distinction and differentiation in the characters to present abjection. He shows that his characters are different from either an institution or the society itself in the long term. As Kristeva mentioned in her work that abjection takes place when the boundary of self, encounters a threat of invasion from the outside world or by anything which is toxic to the self, and it seems to be impaired and separated from the boundaries of the individual. The threats can be internal, or they can be external (Rudge 509). Therefore, she argued that whatever “disrupts identity system and order” wakes up “abjection” and the state of abjection does not value boundaries, laws, rules and regulations, or norms. More lines from the play *The Flute* explain how Ali manifested abjection in his writings:

No one wants to become a Meerasi because it is not a respectable profession and sometimes, they bring religion also to say that socially it is not good to become a meerasi. When a Meerasi beats his dholki they put fingers in their ears. The politicians talk about the future and preachers also speak of the future. no one speaks about the past. Only a Meerasi talks about the past. But no one hears him because he is not respectable. He is not worth listening to.

. But they do not like that. They spit on that and call it a sin. Is it sinful or not?
(Ali 99-100)

Keeping the analysis in line with Kristeva's theory (1982), these quoted lines present the threat to the identity of Meerasi. The threat, in this case, is the internal threat. However, later in the play, it becomes external also but according to the above-mentioned lines, the threat to identity is internal for the character. This threat is why it is seen that the character has fallen into a state of abjection because there is sadness, anger, and confusion which is turning the real self-inside out. It is also noted that the reaction is sudden just like a breakdown or an emotional burnout and it comes out in the form of rage and madness which include certain elements of irrational behaviour. As explained by Kristeva (1982), abjection is "a huge and a sudden emergence of uncanniness" which is a strange, surprising, and powerful response to the threat. It is further argued that abjection happens because an individual life is being disrupted by inferior objects which threaten the boundaries of self (McAfee 125). Ali has used different ways in his plays to create that sudden outburst and he has created different elements to bring out abjection in his characters.

His plays are full of the moments where there is huge criticism of the hypocrisy of the religious classes who pretend to be religious but practice taboos; the line taken from *The Flute* presents social taboos as follows:

Orpheus: My drum is stronger than their prayers

Hades: Was he not allowed to play drums in public?

Randia: Is he not allowed to entertain?

Hades: Has he committed a blaspheme?

Randia: Is entertainment blaspheme?

Hades: Is laughter also blasphemy? (Ali 80-88)

Taboos are mostly irrational in disposition; they are abnormal and loathsome, and they give rise to violence as they provoke abjection among the individuals who receive hatred as a response towards rejecting taboos. In lines taken from *The Breath* Ali explains how taboos define the social roles and gender roles in the society. Rani initiates intimacy with Raja, to which Raja responds:

Raja: Is It proper? I mean nothing wrong with it. I am a man, and you are a woman.

Rani: We are husband and wife.

Raja: You are right, I think. (Ali 27)

The above-mentioned lines present how characters experience abjection for their social roles as well. Even though the world has progressed, and contemporary society promotes equal working for both women and men for better living, yet the problem of sexism remains there. Although not being labelled as a feminist writer, Ali has used the abject art to present how feminism is mostly viewed as abject and women are oppressed in a patriarchal culture and the struggles women have to go through to reclaim their identity and position in the society. Ali has used verbal forms, physical gestures, actions, and tabooed roles (reference towards prostitutes) to criticise stereotypes prevalent in society and the oppressed role of women. As Kristeva (1982) highlights that “*abjection is something that disturbs identity and order*”, deeply it is much more than just personal hygiene and lack of health. She also discussed the paradoxical, ambiguous, and penetrable nature of abject because it is the invasion of the object in the space of the subject that allows the individual to recognise self and sustain their identity unless there is a visible threat. She further argued that “the abject does not stop to challenge its master” (Phillips 20).

Thus, in a society where social order was established through a patriarchal system and female bodily functions and social roles are often subjected to the abject, Ali used the opportunity to take the advantage of the taboos and break down the boundaries of gender roles and bring down the ideas which support the traditional gender identities. He has done this by presenting enlightenment in his characters. Moreover, Ali has used the abject art forms to distort the idea of arts and typical beauty. Women patriarchies have to take care of their bodies and fashion according to how they are ordered. They are asked to maintain themselves in the traditional forms of beauty and aesthetics which are suggested by men. Women who go the other way are considered unhygienic and ugly.

The same is the case for the institutions where art is displayed in the form of perfection and anything which is visually unpleasing and disturbing is not displayed for the exhibition. Abject art is used to threaten the space of the institutions and patriarchy. Ali has used abject art to create tension between what can be described as the art and what cannot be, by providing different perspectives and opportunities to discuss the female issues and gender roles. No matter what class of the people he has presented or what era he has shown in his plays, he has given equal presentation of reality for both male and female characters. In violence, sexual desire, madness, or making life choices, Ali has presented equality of the characters. The sexuality and their desire for romance which is a taboo in Pakistani society have been portrayed in Ali’s female characters:

Rani: I didn’t get my anniversary kiss yet

Raja: Is that necessary?

Rani: (coming closer) Mandatory

Raja: How?

Rani: An anniversary is incomplete without a kiss.

Raja: Should we complete it?

Rani: Sure. (p 26)

Ali has clearly shown that even in her old age Rani is a character who is fascinated by the idea of romance. Rani is straightforward in her demands; she is taking the lead in an act where the man is often seen to do so. By highlighting this, Ali has elaborated that females are not just objects of desire only, but they experience desire just like men. This provokes the idea of abjection, for a woman who is sure of her sexuality and what she wants from a man is considered to be forward and so Females have been given their gender roles based on the taboos (Keltner, 22). The perspective about their sexuality is the basic tool for assigning their gender role. However, by showing the burning desire in the female characters Ali has disrupted the taboo and has presented liberation for the female erotic self. He has re-defined the women's experience in a romantic relationship, and he has changed the way women's sexuality is viewed in the patriarchal tabooed society. Around the idea of marriage, there are further taboos associated with it, as shown in *The Breath*:

Heer: I am in love.

Rani: With whom?

Heer: With Pommi. We both love each other. But my mother is against the marriage. Pommi is a Malik by caste, and we are Gujjars. Gujjars are very strict in matters of caste. (Ali 18)

Thus, Ali's plays present criticism of the taboos related to the female erotic self. He has shattered the previously existing definitions and ideas about gender roles and his characters echo that there is a dominant female in the house, who would like to have romance in her way instead of the conventional patriarch way. His female characters are vocal, bold, and expressive and they present their point of view exactly the way it is. In recent times, the construction of body image, bodily practices, and related behaviours are considered the most important elements in the construction of identity in literature and art. Therefore, in the contemporary 'postmodern' societies, there are a lot of questions about

the construction of the identity (Beardsworth 67)

In *The Odyssey*, Ali explores more taboos and stereotypes, namely that of HIV. As a result of sexual abuse by his tenants, Telemachus contracts HIV. Odysseus's reaction to the news encompasses all that is wrong in Pakistani society; the obsession with purity, race, caste and everything in between:

Odysseus: (dragging Penelope forcefully away from Telemachus) Answer the fucking question (holding her throat) You were responsible for him. You destroyed my future. My name and my caste, No HIV in my ancestors. I have only one son. I cannot marry again at this age. He was to take my lineage forward. (Ali 25)

Here, it is shown that how taboos and stereotypes have reduced a person's sense of self and identity to only what is strictly defined. Odysseus is more concerned with how his sense of worth and self in society is affected by HIV rather than how much his son has suffered. He is not concerned with Telemachus's suffering, he is concerned with losing face and the loss of his lineage. The taboo of HIV has subverted his identity to that only of a man whose son has HIV, nothing more than that. He is othered because of his son's disease. Therefore, he is rendered abject, both in society and within his psyche. Similarly, the scene in which the body of a child is discovered under the neem tree:

Crowd: (They push the bamboo forward. Suddenly a sack rises to the surface of the water)

What is it? (They open it and the dead body of a prematurely delivered baby is discovered)

Fifth Voice: An illegitimate child, I think. (Ali 38)

There are two things at play here. The taboo of rape and the taboo of an illegitimate child. In many cases in Pakistan, babies are dumped like this because of the stigma associated with rape. The taboo around rape is so strong that many women do not come forward for fear of their reputations being destroyed; in the worst-case scenario, they may be killed. The woman is the receptacle of the patriarchy's norms. She is an object and a man's property. The trauma of rape is not considered, but the soiling of her "honour" and by proxy of her family name is considered first and foremost. Another aspect that comes from the aftermath of rape is that of unwanted childbirth. As per Kristeva, the child is the product of its mother's abject. The unwanted child from rape, therefore, is abject by virtue of the act through which it was conceived. Its entire identity is centered around "whose was

it?” The identity of the mother and child therefore are subverted towards the abject; the child who is illegitimate and the mother who was raped. The entire identity of the rape victim is subverted; she has been subjected to rape. She becomes a cautionary tale, a subject of pity, horror and disgust. Her character is stereotyped as loose. She becomes an object highlighting the abject. The play has a constant “stench”, which is not merely for creating an atmosphere. The stench is from the grief that his characters suffer. It is the stench of the taboo that prevents people from living their lives. It is the smell of the stereotyping that has caused many bodies to rot. It is implied that the child is Penelope’s when after the body is discovered, stage directions indicate that Penelope and Odysseus be illuminated with a spotlight (Ali 38) The act of rape has been committed on Telemachus as well. The shame that surrounds homosexuality and being a rape victim as a man leads Telemachus to falsely confess that he has slept with women when his father threatens him with a gun:

Telemachus: Don’t shoot. Don’t shoot. Yes, I sleep with women. Yes, I sleep with women. (Ali 27)

Telemachus’s sense of self as pious boy who calls the prayer is reduced to him being HIV positive. He is forced to give a false confession to rescue whatever sense of self he has as a heterosexual man. Again, Ali masterfully shows how the abject conform to stereotypes because they are shaping the sense of self and identity innate to every person. Ali shows how the self is subverted to a mere label and thus is conformity ensured in society. However, such conformance is not passive, and may give rise to an awakening and understanding that self lies beyond what society conforms on it. The self, sooner or later, revolts.

4.5 Abjection and Uncanny Social Existence

It has already been established in *Abjection: Self and Identity* that the abject self exists in a limbo. It is neither here nor there. The social abjection theory by Imogen Tyler dictates that exclusion of the abject can be viewed from multiple perspectives. The excluded are forced to live at the periphery of “modernity”, and as such their exclusionary state has many layers, but most notably they exist at the fringes of the socio-political fabric. Ali in his plays has brought the socially and politically to the centre of his story telling. He has amplified the abject and their disassociation, both mental and societal, in social structures.

Kristeva’s theory of abjection can be interpreted as the abject, created from the maternal and divorced from it, has the capacity to act as a protective force in the face of rigid norms, politics and structures that serve the higher echelons. However, the abject does not align with the idea of active revolt. Rather it is a mental discarding of all the shackles

that hold a person firmly tied to the definitions within a society. These include class, politics, norms, stereotypes and taboos. Therefore, the researcher argues that Ali has used the abject in his writings to discuss political and cultural trappings. In the environment where the society is contaminated with conventional flaws in the culture and politics, he has used the abject as a marker of disconnect from the conformity of cultural edicts, criticism, promotion of false religious values, norms, and the political system. This line from *The Prisoners* explains the abjectness towards religion and culture. “Grave. Torments of the grave. Redemption. Salvation. Sins forgiveness that is it” (Ali 60). These lines from the play explain the nature of religion as explained to the people. Ali presents his criticism on the religion that rather than serving as tool for betterment of humanity and guidance, it is used blindly by preachers and followers for the filthy interests for ‘sin and salvation’ only (Graves-Brown 134). Here the writer is in a state of abjection himself. He questions the existence of religion and a higher power that allows such atrocities to happen. With such and economic disturbance, the writer questions what is the role of religion in stopping this chaos? Ali can be described as a writer who is overtly political, humanitarian, feminist, socialist, and concerned with sexual and socio-economic oppression as demonstrated in his three plays. Ali specifically writes about the political and social issues creating a strong debate on capitalism and human rights in general as demonstrated in the lines from his play *The Flute*:

Randia: ... What more? 9/11? Afghanistan? Iraq? What more? Suicides? Well, some commit for love others for not having enough to eat. Elections? ...Local Election?Yes, you celebrate that because you are the atomic power...Learn to mourn and celebrate? What more? New political parties? Class Struggle? A literacy rate has gone higher. So, what more? (Ali 116)

The above-mentioned lines show the humanitarian and political concern Ali has in the long term. At the same time, Ali’s plays are multi-dimensional which are difficult to characterize in bulks and have different characteristics presenting chaos and a haunting atmosphere of horror, madness, uncanniness, unclear intentions, complex characters, and many combinations of language and unconventional actions and stage designs (McAfee 130). His political views are straightforwardly harsh as demonstrated through his character Raja:

Raja: Election? (Smokes a cigarette) whom are you giving the vote?

Raja: Fuck them all. (Ali 27)

As stated before, the abject creates a disconnect between the norms and the person. They do not care to conform to the edicts of society, and neither are they interested in contributing to a system that serves only to imprison them further. Ali has raised his finger on the neutrals of the society which is mostly the middle class. He has shown his rejection and protest against the politicians in verbal form. The way Ali writes his plays divides the society into two major divisions as mentioned earlier, where the ones in the fancy rooms are important ones who are responsible for the changes in the society; he also shows that these are the people who refuse to make the change in society because of the influence of the Elites (Singh 267). He has also shown that educated people who truly know the agenda of the politicians and their schemes do not fall for political fanatics since they know the reality of the politics. By not giving the vote, they choose not to choose the lesser evil yet, in doing so they also let the greater evil take over. The use of the vocabulary and the abusive language by Ali towards the politicians show how much he is frustrated with the political system, and he does not fear showing his aggression towards them in his writings as a form of abjection.

Ali points out the loopholes in the overall Pakistani socio-political fabric, where killing and murdering is glamorized based on political and caste-based hostilities. Also, it shows the openness for the practice of killing and murdering a person to take political and cultural revenge. From General Ayub Khan's first military coup in 1958 to the East Pakistan's division in 1971 (now Bangladesh), to Zia's regime, and on to the present crisis of religious and ethnic hostility still jolting so-called democratic Pakistan, many have questioned whether or not Pakistan will ever achieve social and political stability. Many factors, including religious and ethnic diversity, have contributed to Pakistan's inability to overcome its sociopolitical and economic issues. It is noticed that Ali is not even subtle about his disgust for the state of Pakistan, quite literally. The people are suffering from a collective grief and are not living, merely surviving. The finer aspects of life are lost to them, since they are being ground in a persistent rat race. The lines taken from *The Prisoners* present the thought process of Rustum and Sohrab, and how they know that their fellow men have no desire to "live" life and they view anything other than their daily grind with suspicion:

Rustum: They do not know about desires

Sohrab: Are you not a human being?

Rustum: Desires have left their bodies...It's merely a word for them...for them it

is sin...

.....

Sohrab: What is the word they believe in?

Rustum: Sin. (Ali 60)

The people are so abject that they have forgotten what makes life worth living. The artist is a sinner, the gangster is a monster, the headstrong woman is a slut, and the writer is wastrel. He has talked about the damaged society and explains to the audience that the society is broken to a point it where systems cannot be fixed and repaired, neither can they be gentled. Every system in the Pakistan is fraught with errors. Since Pakistan's formation and the departure of its colonial rulers in 1947, the country and its people have been plagued by sociopolitical instability and conflicts. The status quo of feudal, bureaucratic, aristocratic, and corporate elites has maintained its predominance in fronts. Thus, a great deal of artistry, boundless minds, torch bearers, honest leaders and individual initiatives are required to alter the thought patterns of a common man and take them out of their social and psychological traumas. We can take the example of Zia regime's sociopolitical tyranny built a connection with religious elements, maintained restrictions on free speech, and ignored the arts and literature. This political context has energized many great minds and noble artists to perform arts:

Rustum: Can I say something?

Sohrab: Prisons give you freedom. (Ali 18)

His idea of freedom comes from the ideological space where people can live with being themselves (Szaniawski 69). Thus, Ali is much more focused on identity and self-discovery rather than conforming to the rules and regulations of society and culture. His characters are lonely, abandoned, abused, manipulated, and compromised in their identities and they only find freedom in self-expression. This is why he presented the prisons as safe place to exercise 'freedom' because he wants to present the paradox of the situation that although prisons confine a person and take them away from everyone around them, they are a place where an individual can be identified with originality. In the last panel of *The Prisoners*, the characters show a gentle nihilism towards their existence and an acceptance of their coming death:

Rustum: Words are a blessing

Sohrab: I disagree ...I must ...But I must ... I disagree

...

Veera: You laugh at tragedy

Beera: It is not tragedy... God giving signs ... My cause is true (Ali 117)

According to Kristeva (1982), the political and cultural abject is the form of abject where the person is in constant rejection against the system because they feel “cast off”. This provokes aggression and creates the feeling of resistance because the individual feels as if the system and the regulations are forced on them to kill their identity. In the light of the corrupt actions taken by the authorities, the individual sees the abject in the oppressors. The way Ali presents it in his plays is a risky approach since he tries to extend the level of understanding of the audience to a point where it can be seen that politics, culture, and religion are a strong influence in major conflicts. He tries to explain that the political and cultural processes are what define the populations and their behaviour which is undesirable, and they are accepted because they are considered a part of the individuals’ life. However, they are not, and they have to be exterminated from the identity formation process. Thus, the combination of psychology and society used by Ali contextualizes his plays to make the audience have a touch on bitter realities.

Abjection is multipronged. It is a product of the grief that exists within everyone. The weight of grief that they carry while being abject renders them in a state of constant fluidity. This is the uncanny social existence that generates from abjection. They are part but not a part of society. They are purposefully excluded and yet liminal included. The response of the mind in such a state is to develop a subtle psychosis that is sometimes overt and sometimes so rational that one cannot distinguish whether it is the working of a disordered mind or not. Furthermore, psychosis breeds violence since it is the only way that the abject can register some form of protest against their marginalisation. Their sense of self is subverted to what the society thinks about them. To be and therefore, they are. The act of survival is such that the outside perceptions are internalised. It can only take a shock for the sufferer to their sense of self. Taboos and stereotypes exist as those rigid structures that shackle them to their marginalisation and otherness. The end result is that the people become indifferent to the system and its machinations that slave them. They acknowledge they are being wronged; this is the smallest yet significant protest they can register. The abject protects them from the outside battering they take. Ali in his plays has purposefully deviated from portraying high society and its frippery in favour of the rags and the misery

that makes the high society in the first place. He has placed centrefold, the common, the downtrodden, the socially abject. People who we do not give a second glance are brutally humanised by Ali. He forces the viewer to see the stark reality of what is like to be the common man, cast off and othered by virtue of his status. Much like the *Picture of Dorian Grey*, what lies hidden in the attic and is disgusting to look at, is eventually the reason for the beauty we see. Ali has shown us what lies in the attic.

CHAPTER 5

REPRESENTATION OF GRIEF AND DEATH IN ALI'S PLAYS

This chapter attempts to examine the elements of grief and death, and their manifestation in the characters of Ali's plays. It aims to answer the third research question of the study by stating ways through which grief and death operates in the Ali's characters. Therefore, by providing a comprehensive analysis of scenes, dialogues and characters themselves in his all plays, it also tries to cover another crucial aspect of their interaction with one another. Grief is an essential human emotion and can become the driving force behind much of human action and transformation. The aim is to dissect and develop a dialectical relationship between the chosen facets of human emotion, and understand Ali's motivations, through his plays.

Grief and death have long been integral to both the human experience and to art. In literature, the darkest of emotions have created the most beautiful pieces of art. Van Gogh made his prolific works of art when in deep depression. Oscar Wilde was wordsmithing his stories while grappling with his own addictions and griefs; the history of arts and literature is replete with such examples. While art and literature can arise from such wellsprings, they can also be the medium for evolution and transformation of the society for the better. Ali's works extensively deal with the process through which grief and death works on the human psyche, and what effects does it have on the collective transformation of a society.

5.1 Stages of Grief in Ali's Plays

In this section, the five stages of grief demonstrated in Usman Ali's plays: *The Guilt* (2014), *The Last Metaphor* (2014), *The Odyssey* (2016), *The Flute* (2017) and *The Breath* (2017) are analysed. This section deals with grief as a common human emotion that one experiences during times of adversity, and a major sensation to explore in fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and literature. It seems to be the major motif and practice in Usman Ali's art of drama writing. It also befits the profound concern and disappointments with the moral and ethical decline of the Pakistani society.

In the perspective of this study, grief, in any situation, can be a catalyst for catharsis;

purgation of emotions through pity and fear bring about a positive change in prevailing negative conditions. Ali's grief as a creative writer, invoking thinking process and deliberations among his audience and readers, is also discussed in this chapter. The purging of feelings through pity and dread is a key theme in Ali's plays. In order to provide a detailed analysis on this, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of Grief (1969) is contextualized in which grief is categorised into five stages, namely, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance

5.1.1. Grief and Death in *The Last Metaphor*

Ali's play *The Last Metaphor* deals with the five stages of grief as developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* (1969). It is noticed that the protagonist Jugnoo faces denial after witnessing the death of the dog that triggered anger in him for himself and everyone around him because he can do nothing to stop the criminal act. Such pessimistic thoughts also give rise to the 'guilt' in his mind and emotions for being part of a terrible society. His silence reflects the fact that he feels guilty for accepting and living in an awful place. In his discussion of political theatre about war and conflict, James Thompson thinks that: "A play or process not only communicates information about issues or ideas but is also understood to show something of the truth of the lives of those involved. It documents a story, displays the real-world oppression of a particular community or replays the effect of trauma." (116-117)

The Last Metaphor, which is a three act play by Usman Ali, is the story of Jugnoo, an accused and a gangster. He witnessed two brothers executed in public and failed to stop it (a reference to the real-life mob death of Muneeb and Mughees in Sialkot). Jugnoo informs Banka about a dead body he discovered but never buried. Jugnoo monitors the dead body until the play's end. Banka wants Jugnoo to rejoin the group because he is their only 'leader.' He encourages him by recalling his earlier exploits and killings, which won their organisation fame. Jugnoo, meantime, laments the decomposing corpse he wanted to bury but cannot. He keeps sprinkling fragrance on the deceased to camouflage its stench and refuses to throw it away.

The drama concludes by unveiling the corpse's identity: a dog. The play is a biting satire on the moral and ethical standards that have been debased in today's society. Humankind is in charge of a massive Sisyphean task; it is one that has taken its toll. Ali explores the undercurrents of the shared human experience and focuses on grief marked by death. In many cases, death is not just the physical, it is also metaphysical death as well.

The death of ambition, of dreams and hopes, the death of trust in the state, all come together to create a perverse aura of death.

Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize winner *Death of a Salesman* explores similar themes, of grief and death. It explores the life and happenings of salesman Willy Loman, his marriage to Linda and his relationship with his adult sons, Biff and Happy. It details the trials of the human experience in a capitalist machinery. It is not immediately apparent as to how Miller has employed the themes of grief and death, but the underpinnings become evident as the play progresses. Willy is past his successful heydays, and he is filled with ambition for his two sons, so much so that he encourages his son Biff to be dishonest (Can 38). He is constantly comparing his two sons with other people and decrying them for their laziness. (Can 38). Willy knows his parenting is lacking; his guilt at this leads to his constant barrage of disparaging treatment of them.

It can be argued that death is of two kinds; one is the physical death, in which the body dies and becomes inanimate. The second is the metaphysical death: the death of hopes, dreams, and ambitions. It is a gradual numbness that comes from surviving. To survive, one must grow a thick skin. For a thick skin, it is essential to avoid aspects of your life that can make survival difficult and create mental chaos. One of these ways is walling off emotions and realisations, and denial. An event causes grief, then the next stage is the active denial of the event happening. Willy Loman is in denial that his heydays are gone: "I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. Willy Loman is here! That's all they have to know, and I go right through." (SedaCan 38)

He is guilty of cheating on his wife, Linda. He is angry at his cheating, and he suffers from his yearning of days gone by. He is essentially in grieving for a way of life lost. He is in denial, he is angry, he bargains, and he is depressed, all the stages of grief that Kubler Ross explores in her work. It does not take direct bereavement for a person to feel grief and all its gamut of emotions. Something similar happens in *The Last Metaphor* as well. The play begins with a poem that sets the tone for the entire play: 'Alcestris' by Ted Hughes:

With all the power in their bodies,
They die
And now I am awake, look at me, I am awake
In the body of Alcestris

The poem provides Ali a background to foreground themes of death and the causation of grief. The central prop is the corpse that Jugnoo refuses to dispose of, while Banka encourages him to go back to his way of life. Here is an excerpt that highlights Jugnoo's plight. Jugnoo's grief is multifaceted; it stems from his guilt at his way of life, and his bearing silent witness to an egregious death. He is fraught with a choice between his previous lifestyle and what his heart desires; he is stuck in limbo because of his anger at state and society. His character transformation is a "death" of sorts. Jugnoo that was "dies" and with the symbolic burning of everything he despises, Jugnoo that will be emerges.

While *The Last Metaphor* bears some resemblance with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in its absurd elements, it is only on the surface. The wrongs that have changed Jugnoo's life are more severe than the circumstances that are illustrated in *Waiting for Godot*. Death is ever present in *The Last Metaphor*. Ali highlights the apathy that many develop for death and all its forms in Banka. For this purpose, Banka's question to Jugnoo concerning the veiled dead body in the following scene is examined. It irritates BANKA that Jugnoo is so obsessed with the body that he refuses to bury it or allow others to do so as follows:

Banka: Who is it?

Jugnoo: (Pointing towards the body) Ask him.

Banka: The dead do not speak.

Jugnoo: Who told you?

Banka: Everyone knows that.

Jugnoo: You believe what everyone knows.

Banka: Have you spoken to the dead?

Jugnoo: (Looking at the body) They speak to everyone....

Banka: What do they say?

Jugnoo: Listen to them before their burials. BANKA. Listen to them before their burials. They speak I promise. They speak. I guarantee. They speak.(Ali 3)

The aforementioned conversation "Listen to them before their burials" is repeated to illustrate the need of understanding the dead, the manner of death, and what their life has to show. Here, Jugnoo asks Banka to pay heed to the dead, which is impossible given the fact that the dead cannot talk. Jugnoo speaks as if he is incorporating Banka into his group, his club that can perceive the value of words, as he asserts that the dead do speak. The

message is aimed specifically at Banka, and the audience is segregated. This is what the writer is trying to invoke in the audience – he wants his readers/ audience to understand nuances and make a conscious effort.

The theatre of absurd started in 1961 and is mostly associated with writings of Samuel Beckett, who presented the themes of absurdity (irrationality and meaninglessness) through simple language, witty ideas and brief actions. Ali and his plays reject the *Beckettian* notion presented in *Waiting for Godot* that “Nobody comes, Nothing Happens, twice” (21) In Ali’s case, he wants his audience and characters to accept personal and collective tragedies that took place due to Pakistan’s involvement in the ‘war on terror’. Ratcliff (1969) has also called theatre of the Absurd a result of post-war phenomenon where dramatists have shown the irrationality of a human behaviour in a world where he is deprived of certainties. It is shown not only to lament but with underline objective of converting the society into a better place. In the plays, grief is expressed through the five stages of grief that Kübler-Ross (1969) has highlighted. These stages of grief can be witnessed in the following:

Jugnoo: ...The first act, the shirt is taken off.... The second act, the hands are tied and third act, they are slapped. The fourth act, the spit. The fifth act, the slap. At the end the audience claps.” (Ali 12)

This particular play is a narrative within a narrative that flouts conversational norms. Jugnoo narrates the story of two brothers who were humiliated and ridiculed by police. Jugnoo disregards the brothers' assault; just as the public intervention in case of police or authorities involved is largely rare in Pakistani society as it may call troubles for those who intervene. Jugnoo here has experienced Kübler-Ross's stages of grief by **denial** of the above-mentioned event. Later, he experienced anger, depression, and lastly, acceptance when the audience applauds. The next scene is complicated as Jugnoo nostalgically narrates about the already demised:

Jugnoo: (Sitting on his knees) He was crossing the road.

Banka: No one swims.

Jugnoo: No fences on the edges of the road.

Banka: You do not have to jump in the canal to be dead.

Jugnoo: I was looking at his eyes.

Banka: No surprise. No one does.

Jugnoo: He had blond hair and a long neck.

.....

Jugnoo: Sun shot its first rays on him.

Banka: It is waiting.

Jugnoo: He came out of the fog.

Banka: The monster is very patient. (Ali 24-25)

Here Jugnoo keeps referring to the dog as "he," who had blond hair and a lock of hair and was crossing the street while staring into his eyes. On the other hand, Banka refers to the same thing as "it." He refers to it as a "monster" that is calmly waiting for an opportunity to emerge and seize control. This monster, for Banka, is "more formidable than the terrorists. stronger than the law. less chaotic than suicide bombers." The reader follows Jugnoo's portrayal of the dead as a live entity, most likely a human, even though his description of the "monster" is too abstract and ethereal (for the reverence that he shows to its dead body). Jugnoo's description of the "dead" is more pertinent and succinct than Banka's, which is more poetical and hazier. Both characters purposefully break the rules of relevancy and behaviour in order to evoke a sense of mystery in the audience's and readers' thoughts.

The drama repeatedly adds to this mystery by first omitting to show the dead corpse because it is covered, and then by using implicature to obscure the identity of the dead linguistically and cognitively. The play's epilogue reveals the metaphorical meaning of the enigma of the dead. Jugnoo disassembles and burns the entire stage production, including the backdrops. All of this suggests something more significant and thought provoking rather than just being an act of insanity. In the epilogue, Jugnoo takes off his mask, throws it to burn calling it "art". Next, he takes asks for Banka's mask and calls it the system. The logs he next throws into the fire are similes, the bottle that goes in after is a symbol. Rope becomes narrative, bedsheets and bedclothes are institutions of society, a gun represents history. After he's done, Jugnoo reveals the body:

Jugnoo: (Comes towards the body) ...

Jugnoo: (Sits down and removes the white sheet from the body. The body of a dog is discovered. He puts the white cloth around his neck in the form of a scarf)

Banka: Who is he?

Jugnoo: The last metaphor. (Long Silence) He was crushed while crossing the road. I did not want his body to rot on the road. (Ali 44-45)

Jugnoo responds to every query Banka poses in a single monosyllable. This suggests that these monosyllables serve as both verbal expressions and symbolic representations. Thus, the mask is transformed into a symbol of art, the rope into a symbol of narrative, the bed linens and pillows into institutions, and the logs became similes. None of them are explained by Jugnoo. The rule of amount is broken because Jugnoo omitted the specifics of these metaphors. The play's title, *The Last Metaphor*, is a metaphor for mourning that encompasses feelings like pity and terror as referred by Aristotle. Aristotle in his writings on *Rhetoric* has defined pity as: 'Let pity [be defined as] a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve it' and therefore it is easily recognizably and transferable to oneself or someone close (Aristotle 152) In *Poetics*, pity and fear are inseparable but sequential with pity for someone leads to fear for oneself. Pity is more 'altruistic' than the 'self-centred' fear that replaces it (Stanford 27). In the book, *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle's idea of pity seems closer to sympathy, which has less judgment than it does in his analysis of theatre (Wallace 29). It describes an economy of pity in the form of tragedy based on social dynamics in which an individual gains power over another by feeling pity. This dynamic is evident in the interactions between characters and in the way an audience is empowered by pity. What is also significant is that one emotion leads to another, and they remain recognizable in the twenty-first century although pity is less studied than fear.

Ali's portrayal of Jugnoo's character in the play exudes pity; pity for himself as he never tried to stop the unfortunate murder on the streets of Sialkot, pity for the victim who died a most tragic death. It is also observed that the character of Jugnoo undergoes what is called **survivor's guilt**, as he remained alive, a witness to a crime scene and watched someone die. This death seems to weigh heavily upon the shoulders of the character, Jugnoo until he experiences all the five stages of grief: starting from **denial** at witnessing such a horrendous criminal act on the streets of Pakistan. He also experiences **anger** at the perpetrators for taking a life, that was not for them to take, he also **bargained** with himself and Banka as he tried to pin the blame on the rampant corruption prevailing in the Pakistani

society. He also went into **depression** after observing the high level of corruption and moral degradation in the Pakistani society, and in the final act, Jugnoo's accepting the death of the innocent dog shows that he confronts his demons and pulls off the white sheet from the dead body of the dog.

The lifeless body of the dog represents *The Last Metaphor*, the final metaphor in Jugnoo's list of all possible metaphors. The incident mentions the two brothers (Muneeb and Mughees) who are neither saved by the public nor by Jugnoo, and the entire play turns into a satire on the contemporary social realities of Pakistani society. Due to the dog's road accident and related emotional and psychological upheaval, Jugnoo is left carrying the weight of the deceased animal. The dog serves as a metaphor for human mortality in the modern day because people pass away much like dogs do. This suggestion of a torturous death is not directed at the dog, but rather at Pakistani society. The weight of the last metaphorical dog's carcass brings to mind Coleridge's "*The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*" in which the Mariner self-punishes himself by wearing the load of a dead albatross around his neck. Jugnoo seems to be familiar with the idea that carrying around the dead body of a dog is indicative of the same guilt of being a murderer and failing to prevent other people from being murdered.

Lastly, in the play, cruelty and injustice, which are pervasive in Pakistani society, are shown as significant concerns, similar to how the metaphor of the dying dog refers to the microcosmic demise of humanity that the modern man must face. In *Ajoka's* theatre play, *Marya Hoya Kutta*, written by Shahid Nadeem, the writer wants to shake the public out of their slumber through such images of the characters. The conceptual high points of the social problems also expose their imprisoned lives to the public. *The Last Metaphor's* action serves as a visual representation of death, murder, poverty, and the corruption that is both ingrained in and pervasive in Pakistan's societal structure. More or less, the play's action, plot, and characters are meant to draw attention to the problems endemic in Pakistan's system. As writing is meant to provoke thought as much as to entertain, Alihas done an excellent job in this situation.

It is pertinent to mention that tragedy emerges from an entire process; death and sufferings are the basis of grief, though not necessarily in the same order. It is the end goal of the playwright to make his viewers and readers feel at least a modicum of what the characters go through, even if it is just surface pity. In this study's purview, Ali's play *The Last Metaphor* is a tragedy. Aristotle's view is that 'Tragedy is mimesis, not of persons but

action and life; and happiness and unhappiness' (Aristotle 51). His explanation of theatrically induced emotion centers on dramatic action unfolding through the structuring of the story, which is more important than characterization. Moreover, happiness is bound up with a precept of avoiding fateful events that lead to unhappiness through an irrevocable action that is knowingly or unknowingly carried out. A human predisposition to achieving happiness becomes thwarted in tragic narratives that warn audiences about what could happen. A loss of happiness is revealed through the dramatic action. Raymond Williams while commenting on tragedy, asks, '[i]s not the end of hope the very root of tragedy? Thus, the fear outlined by Aristotle is also a fear of losing hope in an inescapable unhappiness. Therefore, it is observed that due to the tragic action of the dog's death, when Jugnoo felt grief and guilt of not acting on his instincts but remains silent, added more to his suffering. The playwright seeks to replicate the human experience on page and stage; Aristotle contention that theatrically induced human emotions affects the viewer is of prime importance. The playwright cannot hope to get his message across if he cannot arouse emotion of any kind in his target audience. These emotions open new vistas of human thinking processes and can aid in what the playwright seeks to achieve. In Ali's case, he seeks to achieve an awakening in his audience through his characters' grief and suffering.

Another idea holds that grief entails several activities. Accepting and admitting death is an important first step. Coping with loss, connecting with the departed, adjusting to their lives without them, finding meaning in the death of a loved one, and investing in life are all part of it. Often termed an intellectual emotion, compassion is widely recognized as motivating behaviour. Gilbert (2017) in her exploration of compassion in the history of Western thought, *Nussbaum* explains that compassion exemplifies emotion and in cultural opposition to reason, and when deemed '*irrational*', creates '*a false cognitive/evaluative structure*' (as cited in Gilbert 56-357). Gilbert (2017) points to the centrality of compassion within Eastern philosophy, including Paul Ekman's later intercultural work and ideas of self-suffering, and points out that these ideas also now contribute to Western culture. She writes that there is a difference in defining compassion as a feeling state rather than a motivational state, and compassion is not always considered an emotion and compassionate action might be accompanied by anxiety or sorrow. *The Last Metaphor* strives to arouse compassion in readers and viewers. The plight of Jugnoo and Banka and the guilt they carry is deserving of compassion, since it is a daily occurrence for an average Pakistani. The way Jugnoo copes with the grief and guilt of not doing anything, and the compassion with which

he treats the dead dog's corpse are not merely theatrical props; they are part of a narrative to arouse compassion within in the audience, and therefore inspire constructive change.

5.1.2. Grief and Death in *The Odyssey*

Ali in the play '*The Odyssey*' highlights grief and in the characters of the play. This play is inspired by the Classical Greek epic *The Odyssey* by *Homer*, which narrates the story of the protagonist Odysseus who voyages back home to Ithaca after participating in *The Trojan War*. Since he was a soldier and had to take perilous tasks, he was presumed dead and his wife Penelope, and son Telemachus, had to deal with suitors to fill the patriarchal role. His son, Telemachus travels to Sparta in search of his father and gets to know about the fame of his father's legendary soldier status.

Usman Ali used the plot of a home without the father's presence to figuratively relate soldiers fighting for over a decade in the name of War on Terror. Rather than glamorizing their role, Ali takes a U turn and highlights the consequences face by their families. The War on Terror is made symbolic of the collective grief in the country; the youth of this generation grows up too quickly, that too, without the protection, love, support and presence of a father. Such as when the father Odysseus went to fight for the war on terror, his son Telemachus was abused physically by a character named Bali. Telemachus starts blaming his father's absence for his fate; the boy is caught deep in grief and anger. When Odysseus reaches back home, he is informed of the tragic news that his son is suffering HIV and his wife, Penelope is bearing an illegitimate child. The tragedy continues when Telemachus is caught with an explosive jacket and he, along with Odysseus and Balli are arrested by the police. Telemachus lays the blame of his humiliation, helplessness and grief at his father's door, stating:

Telemachus: "My father fights for the state. But his son is alone. The state runs Balli, Billu, Baber, and Birju. Where is he? He has spent ten years away from his home and his home is yelling at him". (Ali 11)

The above-mentioned lines are reflective of his deprivation and nonexistence. This youth is seen with a lost soul, who needs a father figure for guidance and protection in his most constructive years. When the youth is left all alone to defend itself, without any guidance and support, corrupt people exploit them, just as Bali exploits Telemachus during his vulnerable moments and rapes him. He is left wounded and scared. There is anguish in his pleas for help, but his father is not there to save him. Odysseus was out saving the

country, while his son was lost to the horrors of exploitation. He is deprived of his father Odysseus love. Moreover, Telemachus is exploited by the corrupt Pakistani system which adds further to his grief. This tragic incident led to the five stages of guilt for Telemachus as he was first in a state of shock. He could never have expected anything of this magnitude to happen to him in the absence of his father. Initially he blames his father for the tragedy but after that, Telemachus is seen angry at himself, for contracting the horrible virus, at his father, for not protecting him, and at the system, for being so corrupt.

The *Odyssey* situates itself within the sexual violence culture ingrained in Pakistani society. The story takes its inception from sexual assault; Telemachus, a pious boy who leads prayers, is a victim of a tragic assault committed by Balli, Billu, Birju, and BABER when he goes to check on grain sacks located in their rental room. After the tragedy, he comes home and knocks on the door. After the door is opened, he falls inside the home. His mother, Penelope rushes to help him, where upon he narrates what happened to him:

He used to rub his hands over my ears again and again. I was using the wiper to push the water out. Balli kissed me but I looked away. Billu, Babar, and Birju came behind me. Balli closed the door. Birju held me by my beard and kissed my neck. I begged them in the name of God. Babar kicked at my back. I was weak. They didn't listen to me. They dragged me into a corner. I accepted. They tied my hands on my back and spat on my beard. They hurled abuses at my parents. It is unholy I told them. I lead prayers in the Mosque. I have memorized the Holy Quran by heart. I have never drunk in my life. They accepted and fucked me one by one. (Penelope notices blood drops are falling from Telemachus' trousers).

Penelope: Telemachus!

Telemachus: Yes.

Penelope: God is with the weak.

Telemachus: But God left me alone in the basement. (Ali 9)

This tragic tale of grief is experienced after the brutal rape of the pious Telemachus in which he experiences all five stages of grief. At first, he focuses on the grain sacks in an unconscious effort to deny the traumatic event. Then he feels anger at them for betrayal when he realized their true intentions. Telemachus tries to bargain with them, to leave him in the name of God. Trying to talk some sense into those grown men by telling them that

he is a pious individual. Then, he accepted his fate and his misfortune while he was raped by them. Finally, he feels anger at the world for being hypocrites, anger at the absence of his father, angry at God and anger at his weakness for not being able to protect himself from the assault.

Grief as per the model developed by Rubenstein aims to identify factors that might help a child cope with the loss of a parent. He contends that grief is the first step is to accept and acknowledge death, adapting to life without a loved one, finding meaning in the death of a loved one, and engaging in life are all part of the process of coping with loss. Individual as well as death-related factors are taken into consideration. He believed that a person's age, cognitive development, temperament, death experience, and medical history all have a role in determining their temperament. Youngsters who saw their mother's abuse and death at the hands of their fathers or stepfathers were reported to experience grief and guilt (32).

After the incident, Telemachus remains mentally disturbed and traumatised; he wants to leave home and expects his mother to accompany him. However, she refuses to leave and reminds him that due to the end of the war on terror, all soldiers are returning home, including his father. At this, Telemachus gets angrier and shouts:

Telemachus: Where is he? My father fights for the state. But his son is alone. The state returns to Bali, Billu, Babar, and Birju. Where is he? He has spent ten years away from home and where is he? What kind of ancestry is this? Where is he? The state he fights for can't give a single cup of tea to its people

There are no fathers in Pakistan. Do you hear? We have no fathers in Pakistan. A son like Telemachus is born. (Ali 22)

These lines are reflective of the hurt and grief expressed by the traumatized Telemachus. He is venting out his anger and grief at his mother, Penelope. He is grieving for his father's absence as he was fighting the war on terror for a decade. He is blaming him for tragic rape on his father's absence. Telemachus discovers that he is infected HIV and is frustrated and angry at the world. Most of all, his father was never there for him.

Ali wrote this play as the entire country reverberated with the tales of grief when the fathers were away or became martyrs. This is an epic tale of tragic events familiar thousands of families suffering this collective grief in Pakistan; their men went away for years, and in their absence, the youth had to bear the burden of shattered confidence, protection guidance and support in their lives. Such families were at a loss about what to

do with their lives anymore. Most importantly, due to the absence of a strong head of the family, those experiences leave permanent scars. Just as Telemachus is scared permanently due to the rape, being diagnosed with HIV, and lastly, being shunned by his father. As a result, the youth became restless and lost any glimmer of hope. It is reflective of the hardships youth of the country faced during their formative years. There has been an increase in incidents like rape on minor members of society in the last decade. This reflects the moral degradation of Pakistani society as a whole. Such issues are not addressed because as a nation, we have the habit of sweeping the problems under the rug; the Kasur child pornography ring is one such example. It is a reminder that these issues exist in Pakistani society. Additionally, if by chance any such incident made its way to the media, it becomes a catalyst for collective grief and later, catharsis for all those who had gone through such hard times or were in the process of being alone in times of adversity. It seems as if the entire nation is engulfed in collective grief.

In Act Two, Odysseus is happy to be home and keeps reminding his wife, Penelope that since he is back, everything will be back to normal. However, it is too late for things to get back to normal, which seems like a cosmic irony. To make matters worse, Telemachus shows his father his lab report that declares him HIV positive. Odysseus thinks it is because he enjoys the company of women and blames his wife for not raising his son well. Odysseus calls his son bad names and curses him, beats his son, and makes him confess that he sleeps with women. On being beaten so badly, Telemachus confesses that he bears a questionable character and keeps the company of women. Grief upon grief is piled on Telemachus, first of his violation and second his protector, his father, abusing him so.

In Act Three, Odysseus is repenting for his sins due to which, he believes, his son is contaminated by HIV. Penelope, upon hearing the prayers of Odysseus rebuts that his sins are ‘unpardonable’ (Ali 28). When she confronts Odysseus about whether he slept with other women, he talks about killing a young man about Telemachus’s age and how he has a realisation after killing him:

Odysseus: He again took that God’s name I believe. A coldness sprang up my spine as the fountain of blood came out of his chest. Was it wrong, or right? More conviction was in his voice than mine. Who is a martyr? He cried he was. Whose war is right? I don’t believe mine. (Long pause. He doesn’t know that Telemachus has overheard it. He weeps bitterly). I felt that I had killed Telemachus. I am good for nothing.” (Ali 29-30)

Through the character of Odysseus, Ali has portrayed the collective sins committed by the Pakistani society in their involvement in the War on Terror. He repents for killing fellow Pakistanis and Muslim brothers in this war. They committed war crimes against their own people. They annihilated their own citizens who follow the same religion and follow the same customs and traditions. When Odysseus killed the youth, his child was “killed” as a result. Although, many would debate whether Telemachus is alive, however it is shown that Telemachus has “died” as his soul is tarnished beyond comprehension. His soul was ripped off as he was raped brutally. His suffering did not end with the rape as he contracted a disease whose name itself is a stigma: HIV Positive.

In the end of act three, the police come to arrest terrorists and find an explosive jacket on Telemachus and arrest Bali for building a Mortuary under the Neem Tree. The police arrested Telemachus, BALI, and Odysseus. This tragic play gives way to the grief of Odysseus, and the guilt of Penelope, who, in the absence of her husband, is impregnated by Balli. This guilt made her deliver a premature child and it was buried under the Neem tree. This grief is about cheating on her husband in his absence. In my view, the play ends up in a tragedy where the perpetrators and the victims were all treated in the same way. All of the characters face the same dark fate of being imprisoned as the rapists, protectors and the traumatized were caught by the police for being involved in objectionable terrorist acts.

Death and grief are all intertwined within *The Odyssey*. Death in *The Odyssey* is metaphysical; the death of Telemachus’ innocence and his belief in his father as a protective figure, the death of Penelope’s idolisation of her husband, and the death of Odysseus’s presumptions of him being in the right. Here the precursor of these “deaths” is grief, as extensively explored above. The grief that these characters undergo is enough to shatter their illusions, the guilt they feel becomes a catalyst for Telemachus’s extremism and Odysseus “repentance. The “death” is the destruction of all the previous beliefs that the characters holds, wiping the slate anew. It is a catharsis as symbolised by the NEEM tree; death and the process of acceptance gives way to some kind of beginning, both for the characters and the readers.

5.1.3 Grief in *The Flute*

Moving on to the last play by Ali, *The Flute* is a tribute to the legendary artist Asad Amanat Ali, a Pakistani singer who died at a young age. The characters in the play are Orpheus, Hades, Randia, and Naggi. Orpheus lives in a working, middle-class home. Orpheus is a musician and plays the tabla. The entire village calls him tauntingly a Meerasi – derogatory

term for a musician in Pakistani society. The treatment that Orpheus undergoes for his profession is an immense cause of grief for him. While he takes pride in his skills as an artisan, the people around him are not so forgiving. In an incident, he tells what treatment was meted out to him when he went to entertain at a wedding. These lines from the play are sufficient to describe his situation:

They put me down and shaved my moustache, head, and eyebrows. Hey were not barbers, they used the shaving machine for the first time. Wounds still there. Then one of them shaved my eyebrows during the middle of the wedding.
Bought a donkey and made me sit on it and pursued me through the entire village.
(Ali, 29)

His wife Randia ²⁹ is teased mercilessly and is called a *Meerasan* by the villagers. Orpheus takes pride in his art, but Randia does not see it this way. She thinks it is degrading. The writer has used the name Randia which derives from the derogatory Urdu term “whore”. She advises him to earn a degree and get a job. She does not see the pride in music, and Orpheus is deeply ashamed of her status in life. She curses Orpheus as he is barren. Hades is Orpheus’s father, with whom Randia cheats with on Orpheus as an act of rebellion against her social standing and social role. Naggi, a charlatan who boasts of evil smiting skills, is a side character. During the course of the play, the flute that Orpheus owns transforms into a cobra and bites both Orpheus and Randia. Naggi tries burning Orpheus’s clothes in an effort to get rid of the flute’s transformation, but they don’t catch fire. In the end, Naggi pulls Randia from her hair and discovers she is bald and wears a wig. Naggi runs away in terror from the entire scene. While this may seem to be a comedy, in fact it is not so. The epilogue of the play can be put into Kubler Ross’s stages of grief. For this particular excerpt, denial is an ever-present feature:

It is about Orpheus, Randia, and Hades. Think beyond the end. Beyond the stage. (Beating the chest). Beyond good and evil. Beyond hell and heaven. Beyond life and death. Beyond race and religion. Beyond colour and blood. Beyond boundaries and castes. (Beats his chest again). What do you want to see more? Really. Tell me. Please, I am here

.....Should I kill myself? Should Hades and Randia kill themselves? But you see that a lot and read as well. What more? Accidents? Bomb blasts? Haven’t you seen enough? What more? Forensic reports of suicide bombers? What more? The last suicide

²⁹ Name derived from the derogatory word for “whore” in Urdu; *Randi*.

bomber was fourteen years old boy. Four thousand rupees were given to his family to blast him. What more? Any war? War is all you know, I think. Do you not read papers and watch television? Three major wars and uncountable minor wars. (Ali 115-116)

The above-mentioned lines are reflective of all the tragic incidents that happened pre- and post-involvement of Pakistan in the war on terror. This passage entails the historical chronicles of Pakistan in a nutshell. It talks about the birth of our nation and our raw beginnings. These lines indicate two stages of grief:

- A collective denial in Pakistani society for the immense tragedy that befell them during the War on Terror.
- A collective anger at what the state has reduced them to, and the rampant injustice that ordinary people undergo.

As the nation grapples with their own apathy, the underlying social ills that cause it in the first place are practiced with impunity. Pakistani society is replete with countless examples of the disadvantaged people exploited and brought to grief. The recent Baloch disappearance protests and the response that has been meted out to them are an effective example. The grief of the Baloch people and the immense strain they are under has given way to collective anger from the families of the disappeared. The delineations of the masses from those in power becomes sharper each day. The grief and anger the ordinary person feels are more often than not, their sole domain.

There are two lines in the epilogue that deserve special attention:

‘You will go home, and we’ll go offstage’

They remind me of William Shakespeare's famous lines:

All the world’s a stage,

And the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts;

His acts are seven ages’. (William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 1623, Act II, Scene VII).

The lines from Ali’s play are an allusion to William Shakespeare’s Act II Scene VII of the play *As You Like It*. In this drama, these verses were part of a monologue of ‘the

Melancholy Jaques' where he uses the theatre as a metaphor for life; fate, and fortune. He talks about the seven stages of life. The stages range from being born to toddler, boyhood, youth, adult, and responsible, old age, second childhood, and death. The monologue compares the stage or the theatre to the world and the males and females as actors on stage; coming and going using various routes, performing multiple roles in life, at last, they take a bow as their performance ends – to allude that they kick the bucket.

For Orpheus, his stages of grief do not follow a linear pattern; he alternates between depression and denial, acceptance, and anger. He is in denial about the dying of his craft and way of life, he is already nostalgic about the days when entertainers and folk artist were able to exercise their craft without interruption and census. He is angry at Randia, yet accepting of the fact that his is an art form that is becoming obsolete. Anger in Orpheus is muted; it can be said that he alternates between passive denial and depression.

For Randia though, denial and anger are the predominant stages of grief. She chafes at her station in life, and her inability to come to terms with it like Orpheus has sends her into rage. Her biting rejoinders and immense anger is not just at her status, rather it is also directed against the edicts of society that bind her. Her act of cheating on Orpheus with Hades is more an act of rebellion and anger and she feels no guilt at it. This excerpt is illustrative of her harsh attitude. Randia is brash and uncouth, but she is hurting and grieving, due to which she lashes out at Orpheus.

Life is being compared to Acts in a stage performance by Ali. There are various kinds of relations between people we interact with. When he talks about the binaries of good and evil, binary of heaven and hell, life and death, race and religion, colour and blood, boundaries, and castes. The question arises, why have we divided our world into a black and white binary? This is why we have problems with those who do not fit into our sides of the binary, we ridicule and reject them as enemies. We seem to forget that there are multiple shades of grey between these binaries and by accepting those, the world can evolve into a peaceful place. We should be grateful for the miracle of life given to us by God and continue to be grateful. The writer points out that we continue to hate characters like *Randia* and *Hades* because they do not fall into our binary. Instead of being appreciative, we reject these artisans who preach love. We, as a nation, focus on the negatives. Ever since Pakistan became an ally in the war on terror and the onslaught of terrorism engulfed our country in flames. Our affair with romance ended as our writers saw negative connotations of humanity in society. There is so much poverty in our nation that a child became a suicide

bomber for merely four thousand rupees. People do not have enough to eat two meals a day. They are unaware of their rights. The writer criticizes the democratic governments who came to power but did nothing to alleviate the concerns of the citizens. Post-war on terror, there was revenge, there was terrorism, and there was death, destruction, and disease in the country.

There was the tragedy of epic milieu. The writer questions this negative trend to begin from the very start. This pledge was to end suicide bombings that shook every nook and corner of our nation. There was a new level of intolerance for people belonging to different castes. There was an increase in road accidents, buildings burning to ashes, atomic explosions, new weapons of mass destruction, and attacks on youth with a renewed financial crisis. The youth had degrees but there were no jobs. People became stoic towards announcements of the death of even those we know. It is high time to get back to being empathetic towards each other – on humanitarian grounds. We need to appreciate each other and build each other up so that we can build our nation. This play mourns that we, as a nation, have lost the pleasure of appreciating the finer things in life – such as music, art, and literature. *The Flute* is the writer's lament of the death of a way of life; the life of the musician, the wordsmith, and the artisan. The grief that leaves Orpheus dumbfounded and resentful comes from the treatment meted out to him by society and his wife for his profession. He knows his way of life is the preservation of stories and his culture, but his own love for his flute and all that it entails causes him grief.

5.2 Death, Grief, and Uncanny Valley

In a society that has death as a recurring motif, preoccupation and apathy with death and dying is present. That is much the case in Pakistani society, and as a result make sit way into Ali's plays with frequency. Ali is a craftsman of the mundane; he takes everyday happenings, injustice, ordinary grief, and crafts it into something that defines the sordid underpinnings of societal culture. One of the recurring motifs in Ali's plays is death. I analyse the metaphorical representation of death grief and the uncanny valley by Ali in four of his plays: *The Flute* (2017), *The Last Metaphor*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Breath* (2017), in purview of Kristeva's Theory of Abjection and the state of limbo. I believe that literature may teach us how to approach death and imagine it from various angles. Classical Greek tragedies have a suffering-based plot, and they frequently conclude with the tragic hero dying too soon while also coming to some sort of self-recognition. In a tragedy, the hero's death paradoxically makes his life significant. Literature provides numerous perspectives

on death, dying, and mortality. The stories use death in their narrations to produce emotional impacts, plot twists, suspense, and puzzles in addition to giving readers imaginary brushes with death. But more crucially, there seems to be a basic and existential link between death and storytelling. For this reason, I consider Ali's four plays, in which he figuratively depicts death, grief and how these two can trap someone in the uncanny valley. I intend to analyse that besides literal representation of death, it is a transition – for a new chapter in life. Not only that, the existence of uncanny valley in Ali's plays is a further example of Kristeva's exploration of the Uncanny Valley exist together.

The uncanny valley is usually defined as the unsettling feeling people experience when they encounter near humanoid robots. It also stems from reading or experiencing literature that features humanoid creatures. The uncanny valley basically calls out the question of “me, but not me. Like me but not like me.” It is essentially a limbo state, where the person cannot decide whether to be fascinated or disgusted. It can also be called as an existential crisis; the confrontation between the human and the uncanny valley can bring forth deeper questions where the person questions the meaning of their very existence.

If one is to look at Kubler Ross's theory of grief in the face of bereavement, this state of “me and not me” is essentially portrayed in her stages of grief. The bereaved may feel disconnected from their grief. They may feel that the dead loved one is still alive. They question their own responsibility for the death and sometimes their own existence since they do not wish to confront or start the grieving process. The dead body, according to Kristeva, is “death infesting life.” (Kristeva 127) She further states that death creates an “An imaginary strangeness and a menace that is real, it calls to us and finishes by devouring.” (Kristeva 127) This can be very well understood as the uncanny valley. The “strangeness” as stated by Kristeva is essentially “the me and not me”. In the movie “1408”, based on a novella by Stephen King, the protagonist, portrayed by John Cusack, comes across the ghost of his father, who then says to him:

“As I was, you are. As I am, you will be”

Perhaps why humans fear death so much is because of its finality. The dead body is a reminder that we all die, our loved ones will all grieve and then they too will die. It is the final destination, and the bereaved are unable to come to terms with it simply because they cannot imagine themselves dying. This creates a grief that encompasses the passing of the loved one as well as the anticipatory grief of their own passing. All combined create this aura of strangeness that does not let them move forward. They cannot accept it; they cannot

deny it. Therefore, they exist, metaphysically, in a limbo. This is the uncanny valley created by death and grief.

To support my argument, I bring in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross; as she once observed, “dying is something we human beings do continuously, not just at the end of our physical lives on this earth” (p 146) death in a way that states: whoever is “not busy being born is busy dying” (164). The study intends to analyse this aspect of death, as discussed by Elisabeth Ross, that we, as humans, continue to die, when someone leaves us, we die a little, when we face a threat, a betrayal, we die a little – so we continue to die throughout our lives. It is life between living and dying, a state of limbo. It is the uncanny valley that Kristeva explores, neither here nor there, born from death and grief.

When a baby is born, he takes the first breath by crying, signalling the beginning of a new life which can also be metaphorically taken as transformation. Similarly, when a person takes the last breath, they die, also signalled by the straight line at the heart monitor in the hospitals and the pulse stops beating. This play exemplifies how much have we changed as a society; the apathy to death and a refusal to acknowledge the how’s and whys of it. Death has become a subject of gossip, rather than being treated by the solemnness it deserves. There is a constant struggle between the acknowledging and denying the grief, again the state of abject limbo.

The Breath explores this limbo state: Raja and Rani are celebrating their wedding anniversary. Just as they are cutting the cake, there is an announcement that Kallu, their friend is dying, beyond help. They don’t go to visit; Rani thinks that it is not the right time as too many people are visiting, while Raja is preoccupied with having yogurt at home. (*Ali* 22). Even when Raja summons the wherewithal to attend the funeral rights, Rani calls him for tea; he drinks coffee while the call comes from the mosque for fabric for the funeral shrouds. Raja and Rani engage in perversion while the mosque calls for pall bearers. Even after the funeral rites were performed, Raja refuses to go.

In *The Breath*, Ali’s characters Raja and Rani exemplify the struggle between death and grief and how it underlines uncanny love. Raja and Rani both have experienced the death of Kallu, which is not a static death. Kallu’s death is represented as the death of theatre and all its finer points. His friends however struggle with accepting his death and go as far as to deny that grief. That denial manifests as uncanny love, where they both treat each other with love, hate and disgust in equal measure. This scene from the play exemplifies

how perverted their responses become to each other. Raja at first apologises to Rani for his aggression, but only after he locks her up:

Raja:I am sorry for spitting on you. I did not mean that. I just got out of control. I am sorry. I said I am sorry.

Rani: You have to lock me to ask that?

The scene proceeds further, with Raja hitting his head and telling Rani:

Raja: Yes, I need to lock you up. You think I said sorry. I say sorry when I have to curse you.

Rani: What are you talking about?

Raja: (Loudly) I curse you from the bottom of my stomach! May you rot in loneliness! May you be raped by ten or twenty men! (34)

To understand this interaction, one must understand that the characters are stuck in a limbo. They are grieving their friend and actively denying it. They are repulsed and attracted to each other in equal measure. The following page showcases more of this interaction:

Rani: Dear audience, why don't you clap for my husband? Give a huge round of applause! Wow! Raja! Your Rani has made you creative!

And then within the same breath, after her derision towards him, she begins to cajole him:

Rani: Unlock the door. Good Boy. Sleep with me. Body hidden rags. My lips. Good boy. Don't be stubborn. Good child. Baby. (Ali38)

This entire interaction serves to discomfort and disgust the audience, especially when the call for Kallu's funeral prayers come and Raja immediately starts exercising. Their over-the-top interactions always coincide with the call from the mosque for Kallu's funeral rights. This shows that the characters are deeply disturbed by Kallu's death and yet fight against accepting that realisation.

Ali's dramaturgy is an attempt to bring in a better awareness of death by arousing strong catharsis through emotions of pity and fear in the audience. He pursues it even through his narrative, where characters remain affected by death of someone they know and consider as their friend, but not in a way that the audience expects one to grieve. And I have

to add in my two cents here, that it was not that Ali narrated that there was just one reminder about the death and the couple forgot about it and recalled later. Ali's drama makes the audience and the characters, Raja and Rani remember and keep up dating through the Mosque about the progression; from deathbed to getting a coffin, to death, to people carrying the body to the graveyard, to announcement of delay in funeral prayer due to rain, then announcement of funeral prayers. Furthermore, Ali adds in the personal dynamic of Raja and Rani, that how death and subsequent grief shape their perceptions of each other.

Ali is adamant in his quest to lay bare the apathy of the masses to death and grief. It is said that grief makes people do strange things; in the case of Raja and Rani, the activities they engage in despite the death of Kallu and the persistent reminder of his last rites point towards a determined struggle to shut out the grief. They are trying to not care, not to have empathy, and their myriad activities, including sexual acts, are an affirmation that they are alive. Through sexual intercourse, they are capable of creating life. In a way, these two characters are hyper aware of death yet trying to stave it off with a mantle of apathy, one that we all take on to shield ourselves from the commonplace horror of death. Ali, it seems, aims to shake that mantle, and break it. He shows the in between in which the characters lie. They are alive but dying, they are in love but hating each other.

While *The Breath* concerns itself with the uncanny valley of grief and death, *The Last Metaphor* explores, grief, death and a transformation that breaks through the uncanny valley that arises through death. Ali's characters had to deal with deep moments brought on by circumstances, such when Banka questions Jugnoo about the covered dead corpse. This scene marks the change from a literal depiction of death to a metaphorical investigation of it. Characters consider if the dead can still communicate in this discussion, which prompts a philosophical question of what happens to those who pass away. Essentially, Ali deftly crafts a story that implies death is not a conclusion but rather a change of pace—a single chapter that ushers in a new era, signifying life after death:

Banka: The dead do not speak

Banka: Have you spoken to the dead?

Jugnoo: Listen to them before their burials. Banka. Listen to them before their burials. They speak I promise. They speak. I guarantee. They speak. (Ali 3)

The aforementioned conversation "*Listen to them before their burials*" is repeated to illustrate the need of understanding the dead and absorbing what they have to say to the

remaining. Here, Jugnoo asks Banka to pay heed to the dead, which is impossible given the fact that the dead cannot talk. However, it is pertinent to remember that Jugnoo exists in the uncanny valley by virtue of the death he has experienced and the grief he is facing. He speaks as if he is incorporating Banka into his group, his club that can perceive the value of words, as he asserts that the dead do speak. The message is aimed specifically at the point I am trying to make that, in the words of J. K. Rowling, who used Albus Dumbledore as her mouthpiece when he uttered that ‘.... *death is but the next great adventure*’ (*Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*). Just like Dumbledore, Banka is talking about ‘dead’ as moving on to the next great adventure. that Ali’s plays also talk about the same function of death – as a regeneration of life into an entirely new form. However, the transformation comes through the uncanny valley. The dialogues of Jugnoo show his being in this limbo state, oscillating between past and present:

Jugnoo: My name is Jugnoo. I do not have eyes. I have an eye.

Banka: I heard about that.

Jugnoo: I am Jugnoo the gangster. And I saw with an eye.

.....The rocks coiled within the bush and blood dropped onto the earth. I came out of the bunch of leaves. I saw a glint in the blood.

..... The brothers were dead within ten mins. (Ali 17)

These lines exemplify the state of limbo in which Jugnoo exists. He exists in the present and the past both. His grief at the death he was unable to prevent or speak up about has rendered him hovering in the uncanny valley. He is neither here nor there. The drama's central figures, Jugnoo and Banka, who are actually gangsters engaged in several violent crimes like theft, murder, assassination, and rape, also depict these sins. J himself admits in Act three: “*I robbed the people and killed the innocent. I looted markets and raped women*” (Ali 24). The acceptance of Jugnoo, being involved in killing and raping is indirect representation of death. His soul is dying, he feels it, and can do nothing about it. The grief eats at him until he is able to give some meaning and respect to the death of the canine. His rebirth and awareness is through death; the care he shows towards the body is an atonement of his apathy towards death. He breaks free of the uncanny valley by the symbolic burning that is shown at the end of the play. The dead canine’s care by Jugnoo is his attempt to break free of the uncanny valley. He is trying to accept his inaction and his grief. Towards the end of the play, there is a dog standing at end of the footsteps. In my view, Jugnoo and the dog

both get a new lease at life through the crucible of the uncanny valley. The fact of the dog's death becomes concrete only after Jugnoo accepts the deaths of the brothers and the canine both.

In *The Odyssey*, the limbo state is presented by Telemachus love and hate relationship with his parents. Telemachus is left bereft by both his parents. He loves his father and craves his protection, yet decries and hates the fact that Odysseus has left him alone to become a target of sexual abuse:

My father fights for the state. But his son is alone... Where is he? The state he fights for can't give a single free cup of tea to its people. Where is he? (Breathing heavily) (Ali 11)

In my view, Telemachus is talking about the literal and metaphorical death of the Pakistani society due to war on terror. This tirade reveals the ironies of war against terror; it is harsh criticism on the state and its policies. As obvious by the above lines, Telemachus poses many questions in the play. By using interrogative sentences, the playwright Ali shows Telemachus' frustration at the predicaments of his time. Here anger is enunciated against the establishment and its false policies. Telemachus takes Odysseus as a part of the establishment which, to him, is responsible for the death of countless innocents. Moreover, Odysseus, Telemachus' father, fights for the state whereas his own son is molested at home. In the context to curse the cruel policies of the establishment, Telemachus condemns his father in front of his mother:

What the hell can be bigger than this state for which your husband fights... You coward Odysseus (he snaps some of the branches with his hands and he is in extreme agony) Be damned where you are. You will die. You'll never become a martyr. Cursed are those who call you martyr! (Ali 12-13)

I also believe that when Telemachus discovered that he had AIDS and his father disowned him, this is a representation of death of trust between the father and the youth. The uncanny valley here is born of Telemachus's grief at the abandonment of his father, the death of his idealism in his father's protection and the death of his innocence at the hands of his abusers. When his father accused him of relationship with women, he was forced to accept as his father was not willing to accept that his son could be an innocent and could have been raped in a patriarchal society. This acceptance is when Telemachus breaks free of the uncanny valley. This, in my view was an end to Telemachus' suffering; and a new

beginning where he will learn to forgive himself for his past and come to terms with his father. The metaphysical death that Telemachus undergoes eventually transforms him; he finally accepts that his father is a weak man who cannot protect him.

In *The Flute*, death and grief are related to the metaphysical. Rather than overt mentions, the death mentioned here comes from the disgust associated with a way of life, and the effort it takes to find pride in it. Orpheus the musician has been ridiculed all his life for his profession and is called a derogatory slur. To add to his troubles, his wife Randia denigrates him even further, calling him barren and all manner of names to convey her disgust of his heritage and profession. The death Orpheus faces here comes from the disgust that society holds for his profession as an artist; his way of life is being choked by the lack of spaces that value his art form. Randia faces a death, but one that sets her free. In her cheating on Orpheus with Hades and her adamant desire to be anything other than a Meerasan, Randia faces the death of the shackles of her gender role, and she is suddenly free to do anything she wants.

The Flute, as stated before, is a lament of a fast-dying way of life. ORPHEUS the musician is dying along with his dying art form. His death comes from barbed societal perceptions and Randia's anger at his social status. He takes her abuse, day in and day out, yet cannot bring himself to castigate her, even when she spits on him and calls him a dog:

Orpheus: Randia does not answer me. She is ashamed of being married to a MEERASI. (Ali 13)

Furthermore, Orpheus knows his shortcomings, he could not give a child to Randia and blames himself for it, even though his infertility is through no fault of his own. While Randia is very clear in her hatred for Orpheus, he cannot bring himself to castigate her properly:

Randia: Why are you so?..... For God's sake, stop yourself if you cannot change. You do not have a heart. I wish you were a man.

Orpheus: Sorry! Cannot hear you!(Ali 23)

It is clear from their interaction that Orpheus still loves Randia despite her acidic demeanour; he knows she hates him but cannot bring himself to accept it. Orpheus exists in a limbo state carries both his identity as a performer, the derision and hate of his wife and that of the villagers. He hates himself for being barren and unsuccessful and cannot

accept that his way of life is fast dying. Orpheus stagnates in the uncanny valley. His grief at the death of his craft manifests as his unacceptance. His way of life is done for, yet he isn't.

In a way, death and grief are powerful catalysts for transformation, but they also create the state of limbo, the uncanny valley, in which the sufferer exists until they amass the wherewithal to break free from it. Death and grief come from each other, and where they both exist is the uncanny valley. It is by breaking through the uncanny valley that acceptance comes, and transformation finally begins. In Ali's plays, he highlights the limbo state in which many Pakistanis exist. Knowing injustice and unable to protest against it, knowing corruption yet unable to do anything about it. Ali's plays are an exaggerated presentation of the average Pakistani who contends with despair, death and grief and exist in the limbo state on a daily basis. They cannot leave it; they cannot stay in it. It is a prison that Ali seeks to break by shocking them into a realisation that to transform, the old shackles must be cast off.

5.3. Exploring Love and Death Desire

The death drive and erotic desire in relationships in Ali's plays has been extensively demonstrated by their unexplainable acts, committed physically or through their language. In the place the characters used the kind of language, and the text is arranged in such a way that it demonstrates their fear of death. They consider it a devastating force that consumes them and horrifies them. At the same time some characters are lacking love in their life, so they are either indulge in acts of violence against others or they desire death, as it is a sort of freedom for them from all the miseries. As presented in these lines of *The Breath*:

Raja: He also rubs his whole face with the lipstick and then smears Rani's face also. Both begin to kiss passionately. The sound of hooters and rescue 1122 outside and Raja collapses on the ground with a cry and Rani is equally terrified too. (Ali 48-49)

In the following lines, it is demonstrated that the lovelorn characters seek authentication by the use of confession which is not religious, but it is an intimate and personal absolution. It is termed as '*psycho-drive-strategy*' where the characters speak or act in terms of 'phobic discourse' which is spoken through the language of fear, despair, and demonstrating death drive. The characters, the speakers, the narrators, and others involved in Ali's plays are all working constantly to face mortality even as they go on the

journey of love. A paraphrasing of lines from Ali's play *The Breath* are the perfect example of how much the characters are bewildered by the sense of mortality and struggle to survive and have their moments of love with the idea of dying in their unconscious mind:

I have desired you

I will desire you at every moment

Even upon death this love

From heart will not diminish

When your memory comes

My tears flow

Give your sorrows to me

My companion, all my life

I have to bear the pain of separation

My destination is lost

With me, my troubles will go to my grave (Ali 43-44)

Ali has represented the struggle and sheer torment of his characters through the poems in the play. It is argued that his characters experience the erotic and phobic sense, which not only terrifies them, but it also scares other characters in creating an experience of self-induced horror. It is argued that such kind of psychic behaviors emerge as a result of primal repression which the characters want to escape, and they want to express through their violent passions that they feel for their quite long-loved lovers. While confronting their unrequited love, it only brings out the death drive among the characters which is presented in their language. Their erotic sense is also associated with death drive and due to repression of primal instinct. These characters have associated violence and bringing death to others with pleasure and intimacy. This is because violence against others and bringing death to other people give these characters a sense of security for themselves and with the little to enjoy. They are unconsciously attracted to the thought of violence because it helps them escape the thought of their mortality. The line between the characters in the play *The Prisoners* demonstrates how death drive is associated with the erotic desire of the characters:

Veera: A revolver.

Beera: What is the purpose of it?

Veera: To maintain law and order.

Beera: It is beautiful ...It is seductive. (Ali 20)

The vocabulary used by Ali in these lines gives a more psychoanalytic understanding of 'self' and unconscious desires. According to Kristeva (1982) as she argued in *the Powers of Horror* there is a greater understanding of the psychoanalytic self where people can unconsciously utter their internal desires in simple situations. Her theory also rejects the limited thinking presented by Jacques Lacan in his writing '*The Signification of the Phallus*' (1958) which was composed as a response to Freud's misogynist psychoanalytic closure written for the women and presented in the essay '*Femininity*' (1933). To cancel the short-sighted vision of Lacan, Kristeva (1982) in her works argued that both men and women step into phobic yearning, and they experience the same kinds of fears and desires. She further argued that men and women feel *chora* which is explained as a fluid desire that is experienced as a result of repressed imagination. If the repressed imaginary world is not controlled or expressed properly then *chora* breaks into the real world and disrupts the entire real-life situation (Kristeva, 1982)

Ali has demonstrated this fluid desire in his Character Randia who has the perfect image of married life in her head, and she ends up cheating on her husband with Hades without remorse. Thus, Kristeva (1982) explains that every single individual man or a woman is subjected to fears of death and castration which is often expressed by using repression bound up in their imagination or *chora*. Thus, her *Powers of Horror* rejected the idea that the construction of self is gendered, and creation of self is different for men and women. This is something seen in Ali's plays. He has given equality to his characters to present their struggles and freedom. The way he created Raja and Rani shows that men and women, given equal chances, are subjected to the same kinds of fears, death drive, and sexual desires.

It is argued that by eliminating discrimination of behaviour and opportunity based on gender differences Ali emphasised 'self' in his writings. His characters are both stimulated and repelled by the abjection that produces *fear and jouissance* and urges them to get involved in bizarre behaviors and indecencies in their speech and actions (Naughton 177). Abjection in the characters mostly leads them into doing something irrational and

takes them to the verge of madness. As evaluated from Ali's plays the female character whether it is Rani from *The Breath* or Randia from *The Flute* the characters are subjected to madness and not their stereo-typical female behaviour or gender role. Both the characters from two different plays are experiencing abject and they are subjected to being abject too. These female characters hate and yearn for lovers, and this causes them to suffer immensely because of the distorted state of mind presented through their bizarre actions and bold use of language. Moreover, Kristeva (1982) explains in her book that "the corpse" which has been extracted from the Latin root definition of Cadaver meaning "*cadere, to fall*" presents collapse and death. She argues that '*the corpse disturbs a lot of the person who considers it a fragile and fallacious chance...the corpse the most disturbing of all kinds of waste is a limit that has encroached upon everything*' (23) Hence, the idea of death and corpse is presented in Ali's play *The Breath* with Kallu's death. There is a disturbance caused between characters, especially Raja and Rani. They are psychologically so disturbed by Kallu's death that even when they are trying to pretend everything is okay, they subconsciously are subjected to horror due to which Raja is unable to visit his friend's funeral. Also, both the characters were seen involved in sexual acts to reaffirm themselves that they are still alive and away from death. However, in Kristeva's studies 'to fall' also means 'to cross the religious and social boundaries' and 'to commit a crime of sin which is considered "the utmost abjection"' (Kristeva 4). The characters in Ali's play are always stuck in a situation as if they are in a tomb more like a psychic tomb and they consider themselves to be in the grave situations *locus amoebeus* (*ideal place for safety and control*) that is empty of love and security.

This is represented in almost all plays written by Ali. They define their behaviors or desires in association with death and their description of dying or the dead are more focused on the description of the corpse. In his play *The Breath* it is mentioned several times that the body of Kallu will "Rot" if he is not disposed of and buried soon enough. On the other hand, where Raja and Rani have some care about the dead boy, they still show bizarre behaviour toward showing grief. In the event of reminders of death and mortality the two characters are driven by their carnal urges, and they are in a state of abjection as they shape up their behaviors and identities in the form of longing possession, violence, jealousy, and disgust towards each other. It is argued by Kristeva (1982) that, Phobic anxiety results in the breakdown of order and calm. The abject is unreasonable because it neither surrenders nor expects a denial, a standard, or regulation; however, turns them to the side, misdirects, debases; utilizes them, exploits them, the better to deny them.

The main idea behind this argument is that the abject is not passive, whereas Kristeva (1982) rejects the Freudian definition of femininity rejecting the thought that women are confined in their sexual role, and they are only objects of sexual pleasure. Freud (1917 & 1995) argues that women are passive rather than aggressive because aggression is something that is a masculine identity. In one of his arguments, he discussed that women respond out of a “castration complex” which is unlike men based on envy and jealousy and these two identities play a major role in the mental life of women. However, this thought was rejected by Kristeva in her work *Powers of Horror*, and she presented a critique on the psycho-sexual model presented by Freud. She argued that to feel physical joy is also to suffer in the abject which is ambiguity. She further explains that:

the Abject is just a wilderness, a ghastly gift that the other, having become modify self-image drops so that 'I' doesn't vanish in it, however, tracks down a relinquished presence in that superb distance thus, a jouissance in which the subject is gobbled up however in which the other, consequently, holds the subject back from foundering by making it offensive (Kristeva 9)

Ali's characters especially Rani and Raja go through this phenomenon where facing death around them sores them and they get stuck in a space of destruction and fatal rumination. As the play further develops, it is noted that the character falls into this void of darkness and they reach the verge of insanity where they cannot accept the death of Kallu any further. They see him alive and talking to them and to feel closure and get rid of this constant and maddening thought of dying, so they hang themselves. The behaviour of Raja and Rani in the play *The Breath* resembles the description which is discussed by Kristeva (1982) explaining the sublime and sublimation:

The 'sublime' object breaks up in the delights of an endless memory. It is such a memory, which from place to place, pause to place, recognition to recognition, love to cherish, moves that item to the refulgent mark of the dazzlement in which I stray to be. I then, at that point, fail to remember the take-off point and end up eliminated to an optional universe, set off from the one where 'I'm', joy, and misfortune (Kristeva 12).

These lines explain the constant changes in the expressions of an individual who is experiencing abject. Thus, the character who is going through the abject makes several different considerations including physical bliss and the consummation of violent and frustrated passion which often leads the characters to go through mental disturbance in “bottomless memory” as they continue to fight to identify themselves and create a proper

form self. It is argued that the characters Raja and Rani in Ali's play were struggling to form a contended identity and when they were confronted with death they were subjected to madness and bizarre behaviour which led them to engage in frustrated and humiliating sexual activities and they lost their memory of Kallu's death in their pursuit to a point they stopped thinking about establishing a self and they killed themselves instead. In the play, Ali used poems and words which were the most intimate forms of private thoughts, wishes, and internal conflicts in the minds of the characters:

A prostitute-and a man- who falls in love- with her – first, there is no desire –
then, passion – the suspicion – jealousy – anger – betrayal – where love is for the
highest bidder

Without trust, there is no love

.....

Roxanne- you do not have to sell your body to the night

His eyes upon your face – his hands upon your hands – his lips caress your skin

It is more than I can stand

Roxanne, why does my heart cry?

.....

The feeling I cannot fight

You are free to leave me

But don't deceive me and please believe me when I say I love you... (Ali 58-61)

These lines explain the abject in the self who leads to aggression and jealousy in the characters. Such aggression and jealousy are not only presented linguistically but it is also presented in the actions of the characters that are violent to each other and humiliate each other based on that violence. In many instances in the play, it has been analysed that the hatred and the aggression of the characters are not because of the behaviour or conflict with others but it due to conflict with self. Just after these lines, the characters are listening to the song Raja, and Rani is confronted with the death signifier again:

The Loudspeaker: It is announced those funeral rites have been performed. His body is kept near the grave. (Ali 60)

And to this death signifier, Raja and Rani Behave strangely where instead of mourning and visiting the dead body of their friend they start dancing.

Raja: We have a dance. (Ali 60)

And after dancing they both shave their heads off and become delusional because of denial and the abject. Thus, as Stephanie (2018) explained in her work. “The self is a repository for one’s psychic past and it is formed on the foundations upon which an individual present the self-understanding”. By seeing the above-mentioned lines, it is shown that characters in Ali’s plays are conflicted to point that they reach the level of denial and try to forget what exists around them and in the past. According to Kristeva (1982), the memory of a person serves the function in the formation of self. On the other hand, it is also involved in the “fall” of the body in the middle of the scenario where a person is bewildered or overwhelmed by a situation.

The erotic starts and ends quickly and the characters in Ali’s play are quickly transferred from physical pleasure to confronting death. As argued by Kristeva (1982), the erotic and death become intermingled with each other where the writers present the most extreme taboo of the societies which is *carnality side by side of a corpse*. It is argued that humans are repulsive towards corpses whenever they confront the death drive which has also been explained by Freud in his work beyond the pleasure principle 1920, this happens as a response of consuming psychological basis for the formation of the identity (34). However, she re-evaluated the theory and argued that the theory not only changes the gender-based construction or phobic desire but it also presents a new direction of perspective about the speakers or the characters that are experiencing erotic as psychological trauma.

The characters also have a severe reaction toward each other and towards their mate which present the primal repression of their real identities which has led them to confront their compulsive desire for authentication. The characters are suffering continuously throughout the play, and it is seen that the suffering comes out as a form of articulation of forbidden passion. Poems written in *The Breath*, demonstrate the distorted ideas about love and jealousy and present the misery of the characters and how they communicate and entirely consume pleasure which puts the understanding of self in complication. Moreover, the characters have bizarre sexual encounters off and on and their way of presenting it to each other is gothic and full of abuse which shows that the nature of their relationship is complex and to confront the horror of death the couple is forcing sexual encounters on each

other. At the end of the play, when Raja and Rani see Kallu They present their transfixed state of phobia craving, and the last lines of Kallu to the couple presents fatal love as he tells them that:

Kallu: I will meet you out beyond ideas of right and wrong; there is a field, I will meet you there. (Ali 64)

Thus, *The Breath* demonstrates the long struggle and interest of the characters in understanding the motivations that control their unconscious self. In a way, it can be said that the entire story is a satire that presents the relationship between lust and death drive. There is an inexplicable fatal attraction between the couple, and they are abject characters who are consummating their desire for each other which becomes overwhelming over time in a death scenario. The characters who are involved in erotic expressions around death are usually disturbed by their psychological conflicts. It appears between two lovers there is always a problem of expression of two different souls that compete within two different bodies of lovers one that is spiritual and the other which is physical. Moreover, despite the religious feelings dominated in the literature, the intellectual writers examine the anxieties of the characters that they are demonstrating. In *The Breath*, it is noted that the entire story is about the struggle of the characters with self their motivations and longings.

These characters are struggling sexually and physically and are being tormented by death, however not in context of theological models of absolution and damnation. It is argued by Charlton that people having trouble with psychological trauma do experience sexual need at the time of near-death experience or death around them (Rellini et al 15). It can be seen in *The Last Breath* that the characters are surrounded by death and their actions are dominated by that death surrounding them. They are stuck in a situation where they have to confront the funeral of their friend, yet they are dancing and consummating within that entire environment. Most of the writers, present grief, and torment for the death of the characters and explained the grief experience of their families and friends also. But Ali has set aside the death of Kallu and instead focused on the living, living in the face of death no matter how skewed the living is. In a normal play, people would expect that when there is a death of a friend then the couple would stay beside the corpse and go on with the rituals to ensure that the entire process goes smoothly. However, Raja and Rani in *The Breath* are seduced by each other and hunger for food and drinks. The consumption of food in the play demonstrates the seduction of the body. The lovers continuously seek to overcome *Thanatos*, also known as death drive, first through food and then through desire.

It is argued that the hungry nature of the couple changes their ability to think reasonably and as soon as that approaches them it forces them to enter a state of abjection where they start behaving bizarrely. However, in between kissing each other and experiencing abject the couple rejects each other at times, spits on each other, and rebukes each other as if they are disgusted. Once their sexual needs are fulfilled, they are sickened by the thought of staying with each other and knowing that there are consequences of abandoning due to which they have to stay together. The disruption in the boundaries set by social order causes neglect and psychotic behaviour among the characters where they stop acting rationally and start behaving on their animal instinct. The instinct to survive and come on top of the death drive comes out as overt, an exercise in bizarre that is nevertheless very human.

It is argued that the nature of sexuality presented in the play is a complicated connection of intermixed objects, creating a mixture of gross and calm exhalation just like around a dead body. The human body is a paradox, that it is a vessel containing repulsive as well as desirable material which is a contradiction just discussed by Kristeva who argued that the intermingling of repulsion and attraction is called abjection. The situation of the characters in the play, *The Breath*, just like Kristeva explained in her theory that, one is unaware of it, one does not desire it, and one only enjoys it violently and painfully. This is called passion. The inescapable frustration of the couple in the play and their aggression towards each other lead them to complicated reactions and it results in both shaving each other's heads and experiencing death themselves where they embrace mortality by committing suicide. The reaction of the couple towards death and their sexual behaviour throughout the play after experiencing the death of a loved one is reminiscent of the idea of corpse discussed by Kristeva. As mentioned before, the experience of death upsets an individual more who confronts it as a fragile and fallacious chance. The couple in the play has cross-cultural boundaries as well as religious boundaries to somehow fit in between the struggle of life and death, their sexual behaviour is in rejection of death drive by committing moral violation for the dead because it threatens their existence. According to Kristeva:

The abject is perverse, because of the reason that it does not give up neither considers a law, a rule order prohibition but it drives the people away, misleads them, corrupts them, exploits them uses them and makes them deny the situation in which they are present. (Kristeva,147)

The couple, Raja and Rani strongly reject death and the reminders of death even when they are embracing their primal desires. They appear to exist in a state of purgatory.

According to Kristeva, erotic is an “ambiguity” that coexists with *Jouissance* which is a recipe for disaster and makes people “alienated and question their existence”. Moreover, she argues that “Pleasure” is all drenched in repulsion. The couple in *The Breath* constantly experiences psychological trauma and all of their actions are a result of “afflicted imagination” that affects their minds as well as their bodies. They refuse to face the dead and they respond to the situation by pleasing themselves which can be explained in terms of violent sorrow. In the eighteenth century, this type of erotic behaviour around the dead was explained to be an imbalance of humour creating a sense of passionate love and melancholy.

Ali presented the erotic behaviour of the couple in *The Breath*, but he did not discuss the past traumas as well as the anxieties of the characters they have faced or were facing at the time. However, he has been able to present in his characters what was argued by Kristeva’s “*primeval essence*.” (Kristeva 58) In rejection of the social and moral code of behaviour, it is noted that the couple reacts aggressively as if they do not care about the dead. According to Kristeva, it is argued that the cause of abjection is the same as the cause of disturbance in the social system. Abjection does not respect the boundaries, rules, and regulations of society; crime is also abject. The couple in the breath is expected to perform the rituals and behave accordingly towards the dead however they defy the rules and rebel against their social roles crossing the boundaries presented in their sexual behaviour.

Moreover, they are also violent towards each other humiliating each other physically which is their effort to conceal their shame and frustration in between their sexual desires and violent acts the memory and the respect of the dead are compromised, and the whole idea of celebrating is scattered to pieces. The phenomenon is explained by Kristeva.

It can be understood in terms that the phenomena of the abject are experienced at their full power where the subject attempts fruitless efforts to identify himself with something on the outside that is impossible to find within when the subject finds out that it is the impossible which constitutes its very existence or being then that is the phenomena of the abject. (Kristeva 12)

It can be seen that before Raja comes back home, Rani encounters with the death news of their neighbour and she is consumed with mourning and grief rituals. At a point, she even shames her husband for not attending the funeral of their neighbour and argues with him to embrace death as she has done before and calls him a coward for not confronting

the death of his neighbour. However, her later actions with her husband are inexplicable compared with her prior mourning. It is noted that when she finally accepts that her neighbour is dead then she enters into the abject.

The same is the case for Raja who experiences the abject as soon as he hears about the death of his neighbour, he begins to feel lust as death surrounds him. It is only seen at the ending that the couples come to their bizarre sexual desires which are only overcome by their delusion when they try to commit suicide. The abjection of self would be the finishing type of that experience of the subject to which it is uncovered that every one of its articles depends simply on the debut misfortune that established the underpinnings of its being. There is nothing similar to the wretchedness of self to show that all misery is as a matter-of-fact acknowledgment of the need on which any being, importance, language, or want is established.

The death of Kallu traumatizes the couple, and they experience “loss” and “grief” forcing them to face the borderline between life and death even the memories that they shared and the sufferings he went through feel like a part of them has been lost. This confrontation with death and the reality of mortal life subjects the couple to enter into abjection. As argued by Kristeva in the *Powers of Horror*, Abjection is explained through an inability to perceive its kin; nothing is recognizable, not even the shadow of a memory. (5) The couple attempts to fail to remember the death of their neighbour and they arrive at the degree of dismissal where they become delusional and feel that he is alive; he turns into some other being for them who can't be killed. They attempt to manage what is going on with their nonsensical personalities and they attempt to commit suicide. Maybe the passing of Kallu has no significance for them but to be utilized for their resistance to the societal norms. When the couple crosses the significance of that, the line breaks down. Moreover, changing the physical appearance, in the end, shows that both Raja and Rani went through a metamorphosis in order to undergo change and alter them completely and that is their discovery of self. The couple feels bad for the death of Kallu and Raja wants to honour the will of Kallu “to not be buried until a theatre is built on his grave” and in rejection of society, the couple falls in rejection of their existence.

They cannot bring back Kallu to have a second chance at life and they are also disturbed by society and its norms in experiencing abjection the couple commits suicide. According to Kristeva “Abjection is a dismissed thing from which one doesn't part, from which one doesn't safeguard oneself as from an item. fictional uncanniness and genuine

danger entice us and winds up inundating us”(126,) it is argued that the bizarre behaviour of the couple, their mysterious nature hiding aggression and violence and their unexplainable passion only demonstrates their need to escape the death drive.

By practicing phobic eroticism, the couple in *The Breath* embraces pain and pleasure even though it is an unhealthy mental situation and poisons them. One can say that abjection is like a venomous spider; it devastates the individual with its tickling and makes them dance uncontrollably. As analysed in *The Breath*, the couple is shown dancing again and again as if they are unbothered and out of control. A person who enjoys the harmony and sweetness received from abjection as it seduces the people it becomes dangerously consumptive and results in creating several dangerous disorders as a note in the couple at the end of the play, they become more violent and aggressive eventually becoming depressive and killing themselves. Furthermore, these vicissitudes of conflicting passion are not only bizarre and mysteriously disturbing, but they keep on taking turns and irritating the mind of an unsettled person as noted in the personalities of Raja and Rani they become more angry, fearful, and sad over time in the play:

Heer: Motor of Kallu's home is not working.

Raja: What should I do?

Heer: They have to bathe the body.

Raja: (He pounces on Heer and begins to slap her) You bitch! (Ali 36)

There is a greater change in the personality of Raja. He has somehow flirted with his maid Heer; the presence of his wife does deter him. He is not only threatened by the death drive, but he is also facing internal tensions leading him to destructive behaviour toward everyone around him. He for some reason does not want his wife to “sew the shroud” for the dead and as his wife agrees to it “he passionately kisses her” and asks her to sing the song played in the Titanic Movie as the ship went down and the captain of the ship was dying. Rani sits down and Raja sits down with her and when she starts singing:

Remember how the music plays when the ship is sinking?

....

Every night in my dreams I see you and I feel you

That is how I know you go on

Far across the Distance and spaces

Between us, you have come to show you go on... (Ali 38)

Raja calms down and then again when the loudspeaker announces the death and burial of Kallu, Raja starts exercising again and makes his wife do the same. He is rejecting the social and religious norms, and he is rejecting the idea of accepting or honouring the dead. According to Kristeva abject violations of religion are known as biblical impurities *"Scriptural pollutant is subsequently in every case currently a logicizing of which withdraws from the emblematic, and for that very reason, it keeps it from being realized as wicked malevolence. Such a logicizing records the wicked in a more dynamic and more upright register as a potential for responsibility and sin"* (Kristeva, 34). Raja and Rani know that not honouring the dead and doing vicious acts around the dead body are sins. Yet they do it anyway.

In the play *The Flute* Randia commits adultery even after knowing that it is the worst sin that can be done as being a Muslim, yet it is the only thing she does as her transgression. She cheats on her husband right in front of his eyes and goes against her norms and religious values. The first time Randia in *The Flute* goes against the society is when she married Orpheus and the second time she crosses boundaries, she forgets about religion and has no remorse whatsoever against her actions; she feels as if she is free and no longer has to deal with the shame. Even though her husband Orpheus has the sorrow of losing his wife and becoming the victim of society and politics, Randia acts cold as if what she has done had to be done and it was justified and Orpheus was not man enough to accept the reality for what it was. This opposition and abject shown in the character of Randia is because of the losses she has met as a young woman as she explains in her argument:

Randia: She stamps the earth with her heel and speaks loudly and harshly. Every word is blasphemy. Every breath is blasphemy! Every utterance is a blasphemy! Every gesture is blasphemy! Waiting is blasphemy! Reading is blasphemy. Exit. Visa. A door. A boat. A train.

.....The woman is the biggest blasphemy!

.... His music was stronger than that night. It was sweeter than anything else. I hated him since childhood. I never wanted to marry a Meerasi.

.....You cannot resist an artist. (Ali 100-101)

The entire dialogue shows how much she has gone through, which has created a sense of rejection in her mind.. Later, at the end of the play Randia in the middle of her conflict and unable to form boundaries cross all the boundaries because it was something which was also motivated by her husband who mentioned that:

Orpheus: I was born to break the rules. (Ali 103)

It is seen that both Randia and Orpheus do not care about the rules of any religious values. There is a constant tension in the minds of the characters that Ali creates. To show abjection he uses the same patterns in his writing which include bizarre passion among the character's escapes from death drive transforming both mentally and physically, bizarre behaviour, psychotic tendencies, trauma, unhealthy relationship, the discovery of self, and psychic breaks that they experience by crossing all the boundaries and limits.

On the other hand, the behaviour of the characters toward death is different in the play *The Prisoner*:

Rustum: They are hungry with hate

Sohrab: And we are filled with love

Sohrab: Would they grant our last wish? (Ali 60-70)

The lines taken from the play show how the characters have accepted their death, and they are not fearful of it, yet they want their last moment on the earth to be of some joy and peace. Their last wish is to be buried side by side with each other. Unlike the characters in *The Flute* and *The Breath*, these two characters Sohrab and Rustum in *The Prisoners* are representative of those people in the society who are honest with their jobs and living and would not go beyond the line to get what they want. However, it is also presented in the play that such are the honest and non-violent characters who become the victims of violence; their goodness does not save them. Yet, the reason Ali has presented the acceptance of death in his play is to present that at times, the chaos of society is such that death is a welcome release. Thus, by using different sentiments about death, love, and desire for another plane of existence, Ali has been able to manifest death drive and fatal attraction in his plays.

5.4 Representation of Death: Catharsis of the Writer, Catalyst for the Reader

Selected plays of Ali, *The Last Metaphor*, *The Flute*, *The Breath*, and *The Guilt* are analysed from the perspective of the grief of the writer which acts as a catalyst for catharsis of emotions for the readers; just as Aristotle defined it years ago. In *Poetics*, Aristotle describes pity and fear leading to an audience experience of catharsis (49). Aristotle outlines a process that can purge and purify (Forten Baugh, 21). Yet catharsis also emerges from emotional judgement. While recognizing Aristotle's limited explanation, Belfiore (1989 (1989) describes 'ekplexis' as fear, and fearful pity, explaining that 'physical katharsis is an interactive process' involving oppositions and the removal of harmful substances comparable to a medical treatment (291)

To mention from the perspective of another Usman Ali play, *The Guilt* was written while keeping the themes of lamentation, mourning, and all negative emotions in view of the death of Pakistani comedian MASTANA. In an interview with the playwright, Ali himself confessed that he composed this particular play as a lamentation for the erosion of serious theatre and artists (*The Guilt* as it says at the beginning whom Ali has dedicated this play to MASTANA). The reason is that Mastana was a comedian from *Bahawalpur* theatre, and he had protracted Hepatitis C due to which his *liver* stopped functioning. He passed away after a protracted illness at the age of sixty-nine. Mastana was his pseudonym, as his real name was *Murtaza Hasan*. He had devoted three decades of his life to the craft of acting. The police officer attacked the theatre during a crackdown and publicly slapped Mastana in 2005.

After this humiliation, *Mastana* stopped acting and visited various shrines as he was disheartened which added to his illness. His family appealed for financial aid from the government, but no relief came. He died the most tragic death. Ali dedicated this play to Mastana as a token of gratitude for the death of the artist and the dying art of theatre in Pakistan. This play talks about the social milieu, why degradation happened, and the complex response to the life of Mastana. The family of Gamma, Shera, and Billa act as the mouthpiece of writer that theatre is dying, lamenting, and mourning the story of the stage performances is a metaphorical reference because the writer is part of the performances. Moreover, the character Gamma is suffering from writer's block, he is not in the rhythm of writing, a metaphor for the lack of creativity, creativity is interrupted, and the flow and continuity are disturbed and halted by those who abuse the art just like the police officer

abused the artist. Art is frozen they are all frozen in their art. The dancer is lying on the stage; the frequency of frozen positions is proportional to the state of the tradition of drama. *The Guilt* is about the shared and collective lamenting form of art i.e., drama in Pakistan.

The Act 1 of the play *The Guilt*, laments for the loss of enthusiasm for writing plays as the writer introduced as Gamma, experiences a creative block when he tells his roommate, Shera; “Gammas: This Muse refuses!” (Ali 4) It appears as an act of desperation, a call for help! For the writer, Gamma is unable to exercise his creativity. Gamma is a theatres artist who switched theatres after working for more than four decades as he says metaphorically: “*It is still dark outside*” (Ali, 6) - pointing toward the loss of the art of theatre accompanied by lack of money and appreciation. This is highlighted when:

Gamma: Gone are the days.

Shera: When actors had light.

Gamma: When writers had stories. (Ali 8)

The above-mentioned lines bring grief to the literary artist, the writer of the play himself, the artists, and all associated with the dying art of theatre in Pakistan. The grief can be felt deeply in these lines. These lines also act as a catalyst to induce catharsis among the audience of the play. This laments the times when the theatre was alive and booming, the spotlight was on the artists, and they were appreciated by the audience and the writers were writing creative scripts for the theatre. However, when Pakistan became an ally to the ‘*war on terror*’ there was financial degradation accompanied by moral degradation of the Pakistani society as a whole. Due to this, the above-mentioned lines act as a catalyst for the cathartic impact, at least for those who love the theatre.

In Act Two of *The Guilt*, Shera dreams of receiving an Oscar for best performance in a leading role but his dream is shattered due to incessant coughing and witnessing his blood clots (27). Gamma is unaware of Shera’s predicament and scolds him for disturbing his creative juices – which the audience is aware that he was unable to write anything. Moving on, Gamma and Shera discuss the change and negativity in the audience – which compels the writers to write content they are not willing to write. They have to write content that sells as they face financial constraints and are unable to pay for their rent (30). All this frustration adds to the grief and guilt of the writer and the performer. I want to point out that all this causes depression in literary artists and art cannot flourish in such conditions. Artists cannot survive in a toxic environment, and they need appreciation and respect to

survive. Otherwise, they, like Shera in the play and Mastana in real life suffer from protracted illness and die a most tragic death. This part is cathartic for all those who felt unappreciated in life and were never acknowledged for their hard work and sincere dedication. In this way, this part of the play is a tribute to all literary artists in Pakistan who have suffered financially, physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

In Act Three of *The Guilt*, Gamma wonders: 'Who will read my story' - as he is experiencing a lack of appreciation for genuine content and an applauding audience. Then Gamma, Shera, and Billa lament the demise of the soul of the Pakistani nation as follows:

Shera: They are setting fire to homes.

Billa: They are setting fire to homes.

Gamma: They are setting fire to homes.

Shera: They are spitting on them.

Billa: They are spitting on them.

Gamma: They are spitting on them.

SHERA: They are mutilating them.

Billa: They are mutilating them.

Gamma: They are mutilating them.

Silence (Ali 45)

The Guilt laments the moral degradation of the public which burns in rage and damages public property, burns effigies, spits on fire in hatred, and, lastly, they mutilate the bodies of the youth in horrific and tragic ways. All three characters, Shera, Billa, and Gamma lament the moral and ethical demise of the Pakistani youth, Pakistani art of theatre, and playwright. In this way, that the writer of the play, Ali is using these three characters Shera, Billa, and Gamma to voice his opinions regarding the dying art of playwright, theatre, and stage performances, accompanied by a moral degradation of the society. This anguish continues in the following lines:

Shera: They are tearing up the bodies.

Billa; They are tearing up the bodies.

Gamma: They are tearing up the bodies.

Shera: They are playing with their bodies.

Billa: They are playing with their bodies. (Ali 45)

.....

Shera: They raised slogans.

Billa: They raised slogans.

Gamma: They raised slogans.

Shera: What a nation!

Billa: What a nation!

Gamma: What a nation!

(Silence) (Ali 47)

The above-mentioned lines point to the fury experienced by the sensitive literary artists as they notice the filth prevailing in the society – This points to the dreadful incidents of murder of young girls, hailing from Punjab; who were mutilated beyond recognition and thrown as if they were garbage. They point toward hypocrisy as people raised slogans against such heinous acts as if they are all as pious as angels. In my view, the last line ‘*What a nation*’ is a sarcastic comment – they are not appreciating the citizens, rather, they are criticizing what they preach is antagonistic to how they act: The last silence points to the silence at the death of someone, they are silent as they think that the moral corruption has resulted in the death of the society.

John Osbourne’s *The Entertainers* deserves mention here. Following almost the same thematic as *The Guilt*, *The Entertainers* is centered on the decline of the British music hall culture juxtaposed against the decline of the country itself. The play revolves around three generations of the same family, and explores themes such as kitchen sink realism, abuse and ethnonationalism. Osbourne’s aim is seemingly to create purposeful art that is not monothematic; rather it takes in all the ills of the society that are a function of each other.

Purposeful art is episodic between the characters of the play, Gamma, Shera, and Billa. The human conditions of artists in a society are in a love-hate relationship. They are

all fallen apart, each character has his journey; writers like Gamma are unable to find meaning with the pen, a lot of inhumanity can be witnessed in the cruel acts of the society where they murder, mutilate, and throw girls for materialistic pursuits, the public gets enraged due to social blasphemy but ignores their own hypocrisy, all such negativity has fractured their lives.

Ali states that the stage is always an action writer's play field, talking to that entire tradition of theatre and drama. It is contended that this play is, borrowing words from Aristotle, a tragedy that recounts the 'shared', 'collective' experience of all those associated with the art and craft of theatre – from writers, directors, artists, and the audience. This poem acts as a catalyst to move the audience and make them feel cathartic – if not for the dying art of theatre and its artists, then, for the shared and collective moral degradation of the society that commits heinous crimes against children. Mourning becomes activated and ritualistic in the sense, as art helps you to think it instils thinking processes, art is redressed as stated by Seamus Heaney that which adds weight to the lighter side of the scale and marginal side of things. To add to this, I relate this tragic real-life incident to the poem which acts as a prologue to the play by Anna Akhmatova entitled '*Here is my Gift*' which laments the death of a loved one as:

Here is my gift, not roses on your grave, not sticks of burning incense.

You lived aloof, maintaining to the end your magnificent disdain.

You drank wine, told the wittiest jokes, and suffocated inside stifling walls.

Alone you let the terrible stranger in and stayed with her alone.

Now you're gone, and nobody says a word about your troubled and exalted life.

Only my voice, like a flute, will mourn at your dumb funeral feast.

Oh, who would have dared believe that half-crazed I,

sick with grief for the buried past,

I, smouldering on a slow fire, having lost everything, and forgotten all,

would be fated to commemorate a man

So full of strength and will and bright inventions,

who only yesterday it seems, chatted with me hiding the tremor of his mortal pain.

(Anna Akhmatova)

The above-mentioned poem entitled *Here is my Gift* by Anna Akhmatova is a tribute to Mastana, the comic stage performer, who died a tragic demise. Just as it is customary to lay flowers and burn incense on the graves; the poet wants to avoid doing that to keep the memories alive by recalling the fond moments and memories of the deceased. It also laments the social practices of offering a feast on the death of someone. It is also a common practice in Pakistan – as the family of the bereaved has to serve a feast to all those who come to grieve. The poet and the playwright want to remember the deceased fondly and lament the tragic loss of powerful potential and immense talent not being appreciated by people.

Collective tragedies and individual misfortunes have been common during and after the war on terror operations in Pakistan. In situations where mere survival is a challenge, arts and artists suffer a lot. Mastana, a renowned theatre artist's protracted illness and subsequent demise is just a minor incident that points to the general rot set in society. Another unfortunate incident happening in Pakistan is the inhumane murders of children and the mutilation of their bodies. It is interpreted that this play, Mastana's plight is a symbolic representation of the general air of death and destruction, particularly of arts and artists. In this way, Ali is mourning the death of all art. As the destruction of art creates a negative impact on the people, they need to think about how they treat artists. This play is about how guilt is rekindled by the characters and helps people reassess, revisit, and rethink the realities happening around them.

In analysis of Ali's play *The Breath*, the death representation is again of the two kinds mentioned before; the physical and the metaphysical. The main characters include Raja, Rani, Heer, and Kallu. Heer is hearing deficient, and her mom has asthma. She does not purchase a new hearing aid due to financial constraints. Kallu was a teacher and dies of a protracted illness. All throughout Kallu's funeral preparations, an atmosphere of desperation and perversion casts its pall. The characters dance, fornicate and lament their existence. This disconnect is further exemplified by the mourners comparing eulogies as to whose was better. It seems as if all people have become numb after witnessing too many deaths around them (a car accident, a dead child found in the street); their senses have stopped registering a death on an emotional level. This is a very transparent pointer to the apathy developed by Pakistani society as suicide bombings and acts of terror became routine. One prominent facet that the writer has inserted into the play was Kallu's wish to

build a theatre, a nod to Usman Ali's own endeavours to create a safe haven for theatre and drama.

Despite the constant announcements from the Mosque regarding the funeral rites of Kallu, the friends remain unaffected by Kallu's death. There is another announcement to see the final body of Kallu, but his friends are unaffected and keep up their perversion (dancing, drinking, sex). In the aftermath, the other characters are ashamed and regret not going attending Kallu's funeral. The play ends when Heer sees Kallu standing near the theatre – even after the death of the artist, art lives on. Art does not die as it has an ephemeral quality. Normal people die, whereas artists continue to live in the hearts of people through their craft.

Death representation in most cultures revolves around rituals; rituals of cleanliness, prayers and the belief of a passage to the other plane of existence. How one reacts to it is the focus in *The Breath*, where the characters are in the grip of grief and face the inevitability of death in odd, inappropriate ways. When one talks about death rituals, reactions to it can vary. People who are part of a similar culture understand the nuances of them, the hows and the whys. Reactions elicited from those who are unfamiliar can range from consternation to active disruption of the rituals. Such can be found in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. Elsein Oba, as the horseman of the departed king, must commit ritual suicide in order to guard the king on the other side, as dictated by Yoruba rituals. He is prevented from doing so by an English officer Simon Pilkings. Elsein's subsequent ostracisation from his community drives him to commit suicide, without the honour of being the king's guard in the next life.

Parallels can be drawn between *The Breath* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. In *The Breath*, Raja and Rani refuse to acknowledge the rituals of death and go about their life, albeit in exaggeration of movements and dialogue. Their refusal stems from a denial of death and its trappings; it is essentially a subversion of the rituals. The same can be said for Simon Pilkings; in his bid to save Elsein from suicide, he forces the Yoruba man to subvert his own rituals, leading to his ostracisation. Pilkings denies Elsein his own understanding of death, the same way that Raja and Rani subvert their participation in death rituals for favour of their own peculiar rituals.

The Breath is less a discussion of grief but a commentary on how humans "deny" grief. The deaths in this play are again of two kinds; the physical death of Kallu and the death of his dream of a theatre. The titular characters are engaged in apparent absurdity;

overt sexual activities, drinking and dancing. Yet throughout this seeming absurdity, there is the active denial of grief. They are scared and do not seem to move past the first stage: denial. They proceed immediately to what can be called as a “catharsis.” In doing life affirming activities to the extreme, they are trying to avoid and hence cleanse themselves of grief.

Lehmann discerns that catharsis has ‘medical, ritual, psychological and pedagogic elements’ (157). Catharsis aligns with the medical understanding in ancient Greece in which the body was cleansed in treatment, and the idea can be traced back to an older idea of unencumbered clear water. It is matched by ‘*psychic katharsis*’, which refers to the purification of the soul, and through passionate responses to music that overwhelm the listeners. Catharsis, then, is bodily experienced. Aristotle prefers *catharsis* as a specifically effect of tragedy. Kubiak (1991) contends that catharsis is a process of expelling something in violent action within ‘*an infinite series of displacements, disgorgements*’ (19). He nominates terror as a precondition – one allowing mimetic terror to expel actual terror. This aligns catharsis with extreme emotions and potentially with trauma. Shepherd and Wallis (2004), however, point out that the broader common thread among theatre scholars over time is that catharsis denotes ‘artificially induced emotion in a public setting’ (177). It need not require extreme tragedy. However, the meaning of catharsis has expanded over time.

Cathartic effects became diversionary within twentieth century political theatre as it rejects emotional feeling as a basis for action against autocratic authority. Adjustments to the meaning of catharsis and accompanying physiological reactions over time reveal complexity in theatre’s capacity to elicit oppositional emotions. Catharsis also carries expectations of an emotional containment within theatre. While theatre suggests unity through a common experience and emotions that are collective, it presents narratives in which an individual emotionally diverges from a social group.

Cromer seems to be of the view in *Drama as Catharsis and Catalyst: Two Ways of Preventing Delinquency* - regarding the benefits of community dramas that they mobilize the local community by creating awareness among the audiences where the audience can relate the play to their own experiences. He extends the concept of catharsis in the view that the plays act as a catalyst – something which precipitates a reaction without itself undergoing any change (92). It is indeed noticeable since the age of Aristotle that drama tends to arouse feelings of pity and fear in the audience without itself undergoing any change. That is why tragedy has been given superiority over comedy as it evokes emotional

feelings of the audience.

It is noticed that Ali's tragic dramas multiply the capacity to arouse audience's emotions of pity and fear which acts as a catalyst to induce catharsis of emotions in the audiences just as Aristotle deemed it ages ago. Aristotle recognized a large number of emotions in writings such as comedy and tragedy, it is specifically pity and fear with respect to tragic dramas that are delineated in his surviving writings about theatre and its reception. The theatrical emotions (pity and fear) can be more effectively driven in the audience by the structuring of strong dramatic action not by chorus (Aristotle, 75). Tragic action has the power to stir the emotions of the audience. By the end, Ali's plays perform the same typical Aristotelean function of arousing catharsis of emotions by using characters of the play as a catalyst. Traditionally the Classical Greeks presented their characters hailing from high status and then falling due to peripeteia – which is a sudden reversal of circumstances or hamartia (hero's tragic flaw). This severe downfall leads to the anagnorisis (the realisation of the situation by the protagonist). This acceptance of one's flaws leads to the catharsis of emotions in the audience. By adopting a similar approach, the role of dramatic action is observed in the plays by Ali functioning as a catalyst to arouse catharsis of emotions such as pity and fear in the audiences. In this view, plays by Ali tend to play the role of a catalyst by leading to catharsis among the audience. His plays also perform the same function to this date and age.

However, Ali's characters, their tragedies and dramatic actions differ in their approach as his characters do not hail from a high status. They are average people, from a middle-class society in a third-world country, facing issues that have been accelerated because Pakistan became an ally in the 'war on terror'. In my view, Ali would like to bring a change in Pakistani society through his plays by creating awareness about the issues of the twenty-first century while highlighting the harsh realities of a third-world country. He seems to be of the view that crime is a part and parcel of the daily routine in middle-class Pakistani society, and nothing is being done to alleviate the crime rate. Hence, his plays involve murder on a street, being witnessed by the onlookers who just witness the scene and leave. On the other hand, the audience of this crime is silent spectators just like the crowd that congregates on the edges of the theatre, watches the scene of the crime being acted out, and leaves the theatre. Just as in *The Last Metaphor*, Jugnoo witnesses a murder, and is as silent as the audience. However, the guilt of watching a murder and not stopping it acts as a catalyst for grief for Jugnoo, and a catalyst for catharsis for the audience watching the play:

Jugnoo: Listen to them before their burials. Banka. Listen to them before their burials. They speak I promise. They speak. I guarantee. They speak. (Ali 3)

The guilt of the crime in *The Last Metaphor* does not rest on those who committed the act, but on that silent witness; Jugnoo, who did nothing to stop it and now this made him lash out in anger and acceptance of the crime that he could have stopped. that Ali intends to make his plays act as a catalyst for change in the audience who comes to watch them being acted out or read the texts. that this is his way of creating awareness in society and bringing positive change. Perhaps, someday, people will realize that the guilt of the crimes they witness is a far greater burden to bear than those who commit such deviant acts in society. In this way, society can think about doing something regarding a social evil on their own, rather than just staying silent and thinking that it is not my problem and why should I stop it?

Ali's dramas act as a catalyst that precipitates the struggle to alleviate these delinquent acts in Pakistani society. In this way, these plays create an awareness that there is a possibility to bring about a positive change in the Pakistani society that is so embedded in crimes in a post 'war on terror' world. Just as Jugnoo realised his mistake of staying silent and not stopping the murder. It continued to haunt him until he vented and accepted that he did wrong by not stopping such an act on the victim. A reflection of man's thought he is free to think, but he is mentally enslaved. Today's man is also the same – he is mentally enslaved to materialistic desires and refuses to stand up for what is right. Just as Jugnoo chose to remain silent and refuse to think about the event as something wrong initially. Until his subconscious makes him repent:

Jugnoo: (Sits down and removes the white sheet from the body. The body of a dog is discovered. He puts the white cloth around his neck in the form of a scarf). (Ali 44-45)

Jugnoo's removal of the white sheet from the body of the dog is an act of acceptance of his part in the crime. He is made aware that staying silent also has severe repercussions on the subconscious mind of those who bear silent witness.

In the play, *The Flute*, Ali writes a powerful scene where Naggi engages both Orestes and Hades in a cathartic act of setting their clothes on fire:

Naggi: Under spell. Yes. Both of you. Circle keeps us safe. (To Hades) Take off your clothes and give them to me. (Hades takes off his clothes and gives them to

Naggi). He is left in shorts.

(To Orpheus) Your clothes? (Orpheus takes his clothes and hands them to Naggi. Naggi drops the clothes of both of them in the circle. Naggi takes a match and burns the clothes). (Ali 110)

In the above-mentioned lines, Ali has used the action of burning clothes as an act of purgation of the soul, which is important to catharsis. In Poetics, Aristotle describes the spectacle of pity and fear leading to an audience's experience of catharsis (49). Cognitive and physiological processes are unified and culminate in an intense theatrical experience, which can be understood as a sequence or cycle that builds to a climax and then dissipates. Aristotle outlines a process that can purge and purify (Forten Baugh 21). Yet catharsis also emerges from emotional judgment (Aristotle 60). Therefore, I see this set fire to the clothes as purging themselves clean of everything evil and starting a new one.

This is reminder to readers about the mythical bird named Phoenix, who ages and when it is time to die, catches fire until turned into ashes. Afterward, a new baby Phoenix is reborn from the ashes. I view this act as a rebirth of theatre artists. There was no hope left and they just burnt their belongings so that even after their death, art can be reborn from the ashes of those that preceded it. In the end, it is my hope, and that of the writer, Usman Ali, that just like the Phoenix, Pakistani theatre is reborn from the ashes and reaches greater heights. In my view, this act talks about the collective grief of creative artists about the death of creativity and the death of appreciation. The burning of clothes acts as a catalyst for the catharsis of emotions.

Theatrical performance is the result of the collective endeavours of performers and other artists who interpret the text, and the music and technical effects, which encourage the willing involvement of audiences. The overall effect can be greater than the sum of the parts when the accumulative qualities in the visual and aural languages of theatre and performance accord with the sensibilities of an era. Twenty-first-century staging, in conjunction with advanced technological and digital effects and music, shapes how emotion connects performer and spectator and the subjective and shared experience of performance. The possibility that a specific emotion such as love or fear can be imitated, expressed, and interpreted without being bodily felt is a foundational precept within the theatrical performance. An emotional feeling needs to be performed rather than experienced by performers. The gap between acted emotions and what is being felt by the actor is called '*Diderot's Paradox*'. The performer does not feel what is being acted because it would

overwhelm the delivery. Theatrical knowledge assumes that performing an emotion is not interchangeable with feeling it, and the context underpins the communication of emotional feeling. Theatre's capacity to offend historically came from the possibility that actors do not feel what they act. Plato was concerned that performance with its falseness would impact social behaviour and Aristotle (1995) highlights the narrative, by placing less emphasis on a performer's delivery. His foundational analysis explains that narratives arouse pity and fear, and these emotions are inseparably linked and invite judgments.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Seventy-five years after independence, Pakistani authors produced a substantial body of English literature that reflected variety of landscapes, social and cultural issues through their diverse sensibilities but theatre and drama as a genre remains episodic. Most of the writers either writing fiction or any other genre established their credibility by drawing impetus of their creative work from the global north in sharing their insights. Ali's theatre is an attempt of creation and recreation of people's drama. Usman Ali's drama is strictly realistic and strangely imaginative, as Ali dramaturgy is much simple and domestic in themes and language, yet it is able to jump to the dramatic extremes.

Ali's thematic concerns of social anarchism in his plays *The Odyssey* and *The Last Metaphor* are portrayed in form dissent for social and economic hierarchy, which Ali considers as the prime reason for exploitation in any society. As a consequence, the gap between haves and have-nots, oppressor and the oppressed is increasing which is taking away humane aspects and values from the individuals residing in Pakistani society. Banka and Telemachus are spokespersons of such dissent not only about their conditions but also, they raise critical questions about State and its powers and their role in exploitation of the masses.

Protest in form of dissent against authority either political or social is the major tenet of Usman Ali's personal philosophy which is very much aligned with Bakunist-anarchist thought and tradition i-e is not to create disorder rather to promote equality and individual freedom by rejecting power of stratification of the classes. Ali through his anarchist perspective tends to reframe the views of readers that they better reflect upon the values and attitudes as he espouses that social change in any society happens when masses wake up and realize their power. Usman Ali's portrayal of Jugnoo is reflection of aforementioned ideology that a gangster has more empathy and humanity than anyone up the ladder socially or economically. Jugnoo is a character that has to choose his ideology and action from

various options available like being numb and disengaged to the murder of two boys like so many individuals around him. Yet he chooses ethical decision with nuanced impact, reflecting important anarchist value — freedom to choose and act— and then making decision that may shape the future of the society. The murder of two young boys is the moment of awakening and change in him. Death is a prevalent metaphor used by Ali in order to portray regeneration, reformation, and a catalyst for change. Thus, Ali as a creative writer depicts what Cohn states that the writer does not visualise the vision into the actual or take the vision for the actual rather, he uncovers the vision inside the actual, as an instant of actuality. (60)

Penelope in the *The Odyssey* demonstrates the same kind of epiphany and transformation when she stands against her husband by threatening him with a knife to defend her son Telemachus. Otherwise during the whole play, she appears to be a very submissive and domesticated Pakistani woman whose life revolves around her family. She acquires her individual freedom and transformation which is core to anarchist school of thought. She is not closing the door and leaving her sufferings behind unlike Nora in Ibsen's play rather she stands her grounds and emerges from her sufferings as a stronger woman. Ali's dramaturgy is noted for its prominent concentration on male characters, with female characters being confined to supporting roles with minimal agency. Characters such as Penelope, Randia, and Rani are depicted in traditional, domesticated positions, compared to their male counterparts and without distinct stories or activities. This representation calls into question the gender relations in Ali's work, as well as the cultural standards that shape his characterizations. While his male characters have the freedom to explore and rebel, his female characters are frequently constrained to traditional roles, emphasising a gap in his plays' otherwise progressive ideas.

Ali's writings frequently address the interaction between logic and irrationality. He thinks that many societal challenges come from illogical acts and attitudes, and he uses his plays to argue for rational solutions to these problems. By depicting individuals who fight with and conquer irrationality, Ali provides a model for spectators to follow in their own lives. This emphasis on logic is most seen in his description of violence, which he sees as a sign of larger society problems. By addressing the underlying roots of violence, Ali hopes to foster understanding and compassion, urging audiences to choose peaceful alternatives.

Ali's strength as a dramatist stems from his cautious optimism and drive to illustrate the role of human acts in bringing about social change. He emphasises the need of awareness and action on several occasions, with the interdependence of ideas and actions serving as his most recurring subject. This optimism is balanced with a realistic knowledge of the obstacles of societal reform. Ali understands that transformation is a lengthy process that will inevitably include obstacles. However, he remains certain that development is attainable via hard work and communal action. Ali's work is a compelling examination of human nature, society difficulties, and the possibilities for change. His plays are a call to action, encouraging audiences to consider their own positions in society and take efforts to create a more fair and equal world. Ali's rich characterizations, fascinating storytelling, and meaningful subjects have established him as a dramatist who not only entertains but also teaches and inspires. His contributions to theatre are distinguished by a profound knowledge of the human condition and an unwavering pursuit of truth and justice. Ali's dramaturgy presents that dramatic form is a process whereby the man's psychology, drama allows the imagination to defer, confront, and re-describe lived reality. In Ali's creative world dramatic imagination is not just creation but a mode to instill food for thought effort to describe and reframe humanity. Ali never defines humanity theoretically because humanity can only be defined through concrete dramatic situations. *The Last Metaphor* and *The Odyssey* reflect that ideological transformation in masses that is the only hope of social transformation, and its foundations are laid in defying authority of social class and politics. Both these plays end with the hope of a new beginning seems like Ali has written these plays with an eye towards the future in order to enhance present conditions, while simultaneously envisioning the future. Ali reflected life and death, creation, and destruction along with local traditions and cultural practices to create defiance against those forces that keep individuals shackled in any society. Ali like Soyinka keeps theatre and performance indigenous by reflecting resistance with the purpose to free Pakistani society from stereotypical social and political ideologies.

Abjection in Ali's dramas is multipronged as it is presented in form of disgust as characters in his play *The Prisoners* are disgusted because their social status and position hence creating the oppressive load of residual and actual boundary divides between self and the other which is required in the counter-politics against abjection. Ali writes about excessive emotions and experiences and his work takes up the uncanny space between life and death, rationality and madness, and intense fandom that is demonstrated as hatred. Ali depicts liminality as a site of pollution and reciprocal contagia at his best.

It is significant to highlight that in this dissertation the idea of abjection is appropriated to examine socio-cultural conditions of people residing in Pakistani society as presented in Usman Ali's plays. Ali has been able to present deep ruptures, physical and mental pain, the frustration of the mind, and the hopelessness of the characters in his plays by using psychosis as an aspect of abjection as the reader witness in *The Breath* that Raja and Rani face inability to express their feelings and emotions through action but the trauma and a consistent uneasiness is prevailing in the play.

Ali's dramaturgy highlights abjection as breakdown between self and Other in *The Flute* in which local entertainers called as Meerasi trying hard to protect their identity and boundaries as Covino says "abjection is part of individual struggle to live as a pain free self". (28) The subject's socio-psychic and cultural positions are disturbed when he encounters with such experiences that he cannot subsume. Like the class stratification in Pakistani society is one form of abjection in social context. So, abjection is a journey of an individual through which s/he struggles against social alienation. In connection to the term 'Meerasi' another term is important to mention here which "bhand". Pamment explains the term, 'bhand' meaning, comedians that are found in communities of town and villages, can be called comedians on streets. Their wit to clap back is noteworthy as mentioned by Claire Pamment (7) Both these terms and communities in Pakistan are socially outcast and hence considered socially abject. They are living in a society where they are looked down upon as Randia and Orpheus in first scene discuss that how they are deprived of honour because they are Meerasi. This creates dilemma of social abjection where these communities are neither rooted in their 'self' and nor the 'other' which is society in this case, is welcoming them as per their desire. They remain in the liminal space of acceptance and rejection. Hence, their social identity is blur and their existence is uncanny as they are in continuous war between their true self and the other, they desire to become.

A literary artist has to confront a number of social issues prevailing in his society, vis-à-vis, media, social, political, economic, environmental, and psychological. Usman Ali engages with the social issues and shares his sensibility by portraying grief and guilt in plays. Grief is the human emotional state after losing something dear. Sigmund Freud has utilised grief as lamentation for the deceased. Ali's presentation of grief is actually food for thought for the loss of theatrical and artist traditions in Pakistan. He laments and appears as if Electra becomes Mourning. The grief of a creative artist at the loss of serious theatre which is currently degenerated into commercial theatre of nudeness and vulgarity. Ali's mourning is

evident in *The Breath* Kallu's will of building a theatre is actually Ali's own desire of revival of theatre. Ali's plays are like a mousetrap in order to catch and to trigger the consciousness of the spectators and readers just as in *Hamlet The Murder of Gonzago* is performed to trigger Claudius in order to catch his true self. Ali appears to believe that the position of spectator or reader is important in order to crack reality. Lamentation on the loss of art and artists seems to be a means utilised by Ali in order to create a sense of awareness in form of guilt among his readers. *The Guilt* is a reflection that art is frozen, performers, writers and artists are facing terrible circumstance. It is metaphorical for entire tradition of performance in Pakistan, where there is dearth and lack of art and creativity. A structured mourning by Ali in order to perform catharsis in form of plays as theatre is a potent instrument for fostering self-awareness, optimism for the future, and the confidence to act in its participants. Ali's plays are not mere art for entertainment it is art with purpose of creating awareness in the society and it is a means to induce the idea of bringing social change among spectators and readers by rehumanizing humanity. It is about analysing, questioning and acting rather than accepting, providing answers rather than talking.

Ali's dramaturgy and theatrical devices are much similar to Harold Pinter and Dario Fo by keeping them simple and direct. It is important to note that Ali set the swift pace of his plays right from the opening scenes which prepares the audiences and the readers for the upcoming course of events in his plays. His dialectal idiom, totally void of any superficial grandeur of style are matched by candour and crispness of appeal. When it comes to dramatic and theatrical spaces, Ali more closely resembles Pinter than Bond. While Pinter's stage is characterised by objects and language that fail to build a cohesive broader dramatic universe, Ali's discourse parallels Pinter's exactness, repetition, and underlying danger, resulting in subtextual complexity. Ali's characters take the stage not just to deliver lines, but also to represent the tensions and conflicts that drive the story. This method builds layers into the performance, engaging the audience on various levels and encourages them to read between the lines.

Although Ali's characters often lack the ability to express themselves clearly, the language they use is ultimately relatable. When it comes to dramatic form and thematic, Ali does a good enough job of blending fact and fiction as it is evident in *The Odyssey* when Odysseus and Penelope encounter in their respective dreams with Greek gods. For Ali, in a religiously and politically polarised society like Pakistan, appealing or propagating to specific political ideology is an artistic tightrope therefore, he adopts a new mode of verisimilitude marked by disarray, fragmentation, and apprehension. His theatre is steeped

in contemporary themes, which he addresses with the intention of denouncing, but posing a problem and locating a genuine method of examination. Ali's realism can be classified as social-political realism due to its truthful depiction of events, which demonstrates how to create a community in which the humane response of kindness is much more essential than the dehumanising and violent reaction. In other words, he wishes a society free from violence. Therefore, he is engrossed with the concept of demonstrating action as a prerequisite for constructing an equal and just society.

In essence, Ali's theatre is that of the common human, suffering common ravages and injustices. Ali's theatre forgoes the fripperies of elitist society to focus on what truly makes a human; sufferings, longings, shame, desire and guilt. Ali's need to portray the downtrodden and their inner workings in a manner that is often not used for portraying them. Ali's theatre shows that despite the ugliness they live in, they are capable of just as much beauty as a typical elite drawing room setting; albeit, it is a beauty that does not need surface adornment. It is a humanistic theatre, full of the grit and the contradictions that are common in the elite and the commoner alike. Humanistic theatre, as pioneered by figures like Anton Chekhov and Bertolt Brecht, seeks to capture the essence of human experience and emotion, often highlighting the struggles and triumphs of ordinary individuals. Chekhov's works, for instance, delve into the complexities of human relationships and the subtleties of everyday life, reflecting a deep empathy for the characters' plights and dreams. Similarly, Brecht's Epic Theatre compels the audience to critically engage with societal issues, pushing them to recognize the shared humanity and systemic challenges faced by all. Penelope implies that humans are puppets going through motions, and the same does apply to all humans across every societal segment. For Penelope's pain of her impotence as a mother can be shared by an elite woman; the anguish of Telemachus can be shared by a rich youth caught in the trap of glamor. Recently, Shafqat Amanat Ali decried how trained singers are no longer getting the recognition that they deserve. It is the echo of the same anguish that Orpheus suffers from; the death of a way of life. This universal application of human experience underscores the central tenet of humanistic theatre: the intrinsic connection between all individuals, regardless of their social standing. Humanistic theatre often employs minimalistic staging and realistic dialogue to create an intimate, immersive experience. This contrasts with the grandiose settings and melodramatic expressions of traditional theatre, grounding the narrative in a more relatable context. Ali's theatre mirrors this aesthetic, using simple yet evocative set designs and naturalistic performances to draw the audience into the world of his characters.

Moreover, Ali's narratives frequently subvert conventional storytelling tropes. Rather than presenting clear-cut heroes and villains, his characters are multifaceted and morally ambiguous, reflecting the complexities of real life. This narrative style encourages audiences to see beyond black-and-white interpretations of morality and recognize the shared humanity in each character's journey. A significant aspect of humanistic theatre is its capacity for societal critique. By portraying the struggles and injustices faced by ordinary people, it sheds light on systemic issues and calls for social change. Ali's work often highlights the plight of the marginalized, challenging audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about their own societies. For example, Ali's portrayal of a downtrodden community struggling against economic and social oppression can be seen as a critique of the widening gap between the rich and the poor. His characters' resilience and capacity for beauty, despite their hardships, serve as a testament to the indomitable human spirit.

This emphasis on empathy and social awareness is also evident in the works of other humanistic playwrights. Brecht's "The Good Person of Szechwan," for instance, questions the nature of goodness in a capitalist society, while Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" critiques the corruption and hypocrisy within political systems. Ali's theatre stands as a powerful testament to the enduring relevance of humanistic theatre. By focusing on the common human experience and eschewing the superficial trappings of elitist society, his work resonates deeply with audiences. It challenges societal norms, fosters empathy, and celebrates the inherent beauty and complexity of every individual. In doing so, Ali's theatre not only entertains but also enlightens, carrying forward the rich legacy of humanistic theatre into the contemporary world.

Critics of English literature in Pakistan may raise questions about Usman Ali's creative acumen in terms of his language, themes and characterisation, considering the fact that his language is too colloquial at times, themes revolve around masses and down-trodden people like Jugnoo, Banka, Billa and Shera. Literary critics may be skeptical about Usman Ali's stature as a playwright in comparison to the diasporic playwrights of Pakistani origin and other contemporary names in drama from Sub-continent, but nonetheless they cannot take away the credit from him for keeping drama and theatre rooted in local culture and traditions as we see *Qawwali* instead of chorus in his plays like *The Odyssey*. His efforts to keep theatre and theatrical tradition alive in Pakistan are noteworthy. This research unveils only few aspects of his work from the lenses of social anarchism and abjection. Usman Ali's work in particular and contemporary street theatre or drama in particular are open for novel interpretation and analysis. This research is an attempt to provide critique of English drama in Pakistan as there is dearth of not only creative writers but of critical acumen in this genre.

6.1 Future Directions

Ali's plays are open for further literary interpretations as this research only focuses on his plays from the perspective of social anarchism and abjection. His two plays *The Last Metaphor* and *The Guilt* plays are recently included by Higher Education Commission Pakistan in M.Phil. English Literature syllabus³⁰ which may be a motivation for the researchers to read his plays from multiple critical lenses.

³⁰ For further information see <https://www.24newshd.tv/01-Mar-2023/hec-includes-two-plays-of-teacher-from-remote-area-in-mphil-english-course>

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