UNTANGLING AUDACIOUS WOMEN'S IDENTITIES: SOCIAL FEMINISM IN SELECTED WORKS OF PAKISTANI ENGLISH POETS

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Untangling Audacious Women's Identities: Social Feminism in Selected Works of Pakistani English Poets

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis Untangling Audacious Women's Identities: Social Feminism in Selected Works of Pakistani English Poets submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil 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.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Untangling Audacious Women's Identities: Social Feminism in Selected Works of Pakistani English Poets

Poetry has been an influential way of expressing oneself with the utmost power to convey strong emotions and social observations. It's symbolic and rhythmic properties allow for the deep exploration of emotions and ideas, making it a unique and influential medium for exploring contemporary issues. This research delves into the representation of audacious women identities in the poetry of contemporary Pakistani poets Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi, within a socio-cultural setting. In Pakistan society, this study uses social feminism as a theoretical lens to understand how the inequalities of gender expose the ways that go into different strata of oppression. The portrayal is of women who challenge the social order by claiming their own agency and free themselves from patriarchal constraints. It is through their poetry that the multifaceted, painful realities of women at the very margins are brought to light, for empowerment, equality, and social transformation. In their writings, at a more nuanced level of individual resistance, Hashmi and Ijaz echo collective efforts to resist patriarchal dominance and sustain the spirits of togetherness and collectivity among women. It is such through avenues, in this study the feminist poetry has made a significant contribution to the literary and social discourses of not just exposing the realities of oppression but also offering the causative vectors for empowerment and changes in society. The study would emphasize that more visibility of Pakistani women is required in an effort to build highly requisite gender-sensitive discourse for the cause of gender equality and empowerment through literary discourse and a more just and inclusive society.

Keywords: *Social Feminism, Empowerment, Oppression, South Asian Literature, Pakistani Poetry.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is very important to society because it shows us what we are thinking and helps us find our way. In the article "The Role of Poetry and the Poet's Mission in the Awakening of Society", the authors contend that poetry acts as a stimulant for social consciousness, allowing people to view social reality with greater emotional depth and clarity. They claim that poetry "awakens human sensitivity and consciousness towards life and society" by capturing the complexities of social tensions and human experiences. (Wajed and Saghar 25). The authors point out that poetry's dual nature—aesthetic and critical—is one of its distinguishing qualities. Readers are able to participate both emotionally and intellectually as it depicts the "fragility of life" while simultaneously highlighting its beauty (Wajed and Saghar 25). Poetry's ability to evoke both comfort and provocation makes it quite profound medium. The poet is thus a visionary whose purpose goes beyond simple artistic expression. (Wajed and Saghar 25) state that the poet "acts as a reformer" by bringing attention to social injustices and promoting public discourse. This is consistent with the traditional idea of the poet as a moral leader or prophet—someone who sees beyond the present moment and encourages society to reform.

The purpose of contemporary feminist discourse in South Asian literature has been to similarly reevaluate and reconstruct women's roles, identities, and agency in literary and sociopolitical contexts. This research explores the poetry of two emerging Pakistani English-language poets, Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi, with an emphasis on the audacious female characters the poets create in their poems rather than the artists themselves. These characters are significant figures in the texts' interrogation and reconstruction of gendered realities, providing important insights on literary representation, social feminism, and identity formation.

The term "audacious women," essential to this study, describes female characters, despite enduring patriarchal restrictions, show bravery, rebellion, and self-assertion. Adrienne Rich in her essay, on lies, secrets and silence, suggests that a woman who "claims her story and speaks with her own voice" (Rich 199) is considered courageous.

These women frequently engage in subtle, emotional, and intellectual acts of resistance to social standards rather than directly confronting them. Judith Butler claims that resistance resides in reinterpreting and changing preexisting structures, and that agency is frequently engaged in "resignifications of the norm" (Butler 185). Audacity is revealed in Ijaz and Hashmi's poetry through self-awareness, reflection, and voice reclamation—elements that enable women to reevaluate their roles and reposition themselves in patriarchal society.

In this study, the notion of identity refers to the intersectional, multi-layered, and frequently fragmented sense of self that female characters create in defiance of or negotiation with cultural norms. bell hooks defines identity as "Not fixed, but always in process, always being reconstituted" (hooks *Reel to Real*). She argues that identity is not fixed; it is constructed and reconstructed throughout the socio-cultural narratives. This dynamic process is reflected in the poetry of Ijaz and Hashmi's work, which traverse the personal, familial, and societal domains where identities are not inherited but are instead created through introspection, pain, memory, and desire. The creation of these identities frequently offers politically and emotionally charged self-definitions in opposition to patriarchal codifications of femininity.

This study is theoretically grounded in the paradigm of social feminism. Social feminism takes into consideration how other social inequalities, such as class, ethnicity, and cultural history, exacerbate gender oppression, in contrast to liberal feminism, which prioritizes legal and political equality (Tong 82). Rosemarie Tong argues that women's liberation is acquired through social and economic reforms instead of minor changes within society (Tong 82). This perspective challenges more moderate feminist approaches that focus primarily on legal equality or individual rights, arguing instead for a comprehensive transformation of societal structures. By addressing both gender and class oppression simultaneously, socialist feminism aims to dismantle the root causes of inequality, advocating for a society where economic and social justice go hand in hand. Tong's analysis underscores the importance of understanding how economic systems shape gender roles and how true gender equality cannot be achieved without also confronting economic exploitation. Social feminism is particularly pertinent in Pakistan since it aims to address the economic and socio-religious systems that influence women's

lives. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticized the Western representation of "Third World women" as a single oppressed group who are generalized by western discourse and their subjectivity is often ignored. Their individual experiences are generalized. (Mohanty 62). This study similarly adopts a contextualized approach by investigating how Pakistani women, as portrayed in English poetry, negotiate several facets of marginalization—linguistic, social, and familial in the patriarchal society.

This study discusses how selected Pakistani poets unravel the identities of audacious women, showing resistance against patriarchal as well as cultural restraints. In this regard, economic freedom is seen as a salient form of rebellion. Armstrong argues "the refusal to separate domestic, reproductive, and waged labor has remained central to socialist feminist thought and organizing" (Armstrong 29). When women acquire financial autonomy and resource control, systems of gendered dependency and exploitation are disrupted. Therefore, access to economic power becomes not only a means to personal emancipation but also a collective avenue toward fighting structural inequality a fact that strongly emerges with the poetic voices under analysis in this study.

In this research, Pakistani English poets, describes a small but expanding group of women who write in English within the context of Pakistani culture and language. Urdu poets like Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz, whose daring subjects and public personas drew both praise and criticism, have historically been the focus of a large portion of female literary studies. Scholarly attention has also started to be paid to English-language poets who are mostly found in the diaspora, such as Shadab Zeest Hashmi and Tarfia Faizullah. But poets who write from within Pakistan and interact with local concerns in a global language, like Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi, are still largely unexplored.

This research uses a qualitative textual analysis methodology to address issues within Pakistani society. The study investigates how poetic language reclaims speech, articulates resistance, and reconfigures women's positions in Pakistani society through close readings of a few chosen poems. This method makes it possible to analyze thematic material, symbolism, and stylistic devices in great depth, demonstrating how poetic discourse turns into a space for female articulation and identity creation. A deeper understanding of how gendered identities are both restricted and creatively reimagined in

a postcolonial South Asian setting is made possible by the methodology, which is rooted in Bell hooks' theoretical frameworks, particularly her ideas of intersectionality and the politics of voice and agency, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of global feminist generalizations through contextualized experiences and triple marginalization. This study examines how Pakistani poets portray audacious female identities, emphasizing economic freedom as feminist resistance, which, as Armstrong notes, challenges the devaluation of women's labor under capitalism (Armstrong 29).

In Pakistan, many prominent poets such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mohsin Naqvi, Ahmed Faraz and many others have made significant contributions to literature. However, women's works, especially in English, are significant as they reach a global and diaspora audience. This form of literature provides an opportunity to understand the perspectives of Pakistani women, which were previously usually limited to Urdu poetry or narrative texts, extending their influence beyond national borders. This study seeks to close the academic gap by examining how Ijaz and Hashmi's poetry addresses gender, resistance, and identity from within Pakistan's sociocultural framework. It is places where voices have been suppressed for a long time by tradition come out with emotional richness, complexity, and force. This study reveals how poetry becomes a site of feminist articulation by concentrating on the hooks, Mohanty and Elisabeth Armstrong's theoretical framework. By doing this, this research not only contributes to larger feminist discussions on identity, representation, and the politics of language, but it also reclaims a crucial place for women's poetry produced in Pakistani English. This study demonstrates the potential of poetry as a transformative and political tool, one that can challenge hegemonic narratives and promote more inclusive understandings of womanhood in the South Asian context, by highlighting the ways in which audacious women's identities are untangled through poetic expression.

1.1 Pakistani Literature in English

Pakistani literature in English has gradually become an important literary legacy that provides complex insights into the sociopolitical and cultural realities of the country. Works such as Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, a landmark pre-partition book that is frequently cited as the founding text of Pakistani English literature, provide its earliest

roots. The novel established the framework for examining identity and cultural change in a language linked to colonial authority by portraying Muslim life under colonial control (Ali 112).

Authors such as Bapsi Sidhwa expanded the scope and complexity of Pakistani English literature in the latter half of the 20th century. Sidhwa emphasized gender, ethnicity, and communal politics in books like *The Crow Eaters* and *Cracking India*, frequently focusing on women's experiences during national crises (Sidhwa 46). She was among the first female voices from Pakistan to receive international recognition for her work, which focused on the relationship between political turmoil and individual agency.

In the recent studies "Discarding Pakistani Women's Stereotypes in Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire," Azim Ullah and Dr. Samina Rahat analyze the way Shamsie breaks the stereotypical image of Pakistani women. They argue that Shamsie presents her female characters, as active agents who take modernity with them while negotiating their traditional roles: The authors note that these women are not passive; they are "active agents in the pursuit of their autonomy" they break themselves from the traditional women's roles in Pakistani society. (Ullah and Rahat 6). Shamsie's female characters do not occupy the roles of victims or passive subjects. They are rather strong and independent; they challenge conventional norms and their place in a patriarchal society. This therefore asserts their autonomy and a rejection of what a patriarchal society expects from them.

Mohsin Hamid, who also holds an important place in this aspect, has won worldwide acclaim with works like The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West*. His writing technique resonant with flowing prose and introspective main characters accounts for topics such as immigration, displacement, and acculturation speaks to the flexibility and thematic richness of Pakistani literature in English on the world stage.

Furthermore, diaspora writers such as Hanif Kureishi have contributed the discourse on Pakistani identity and the immigrant experience in the West. Kureishi's expression of cultural hybridity and belonging, in works like *Buddha in Suburbia* and *My Beautiful Laundromat*, bring out some aspects of the complexity of the Pakistani

diasporic communities and the negotiation of their identity within a multicultural setting, as highlighted by Shamsie.

Muneeza Shamsie recognizes the development and importance of Pakistani English literature. Shamsie's work *A Hybrid Tapestry: The Development of Pakistani English Literature* is indeed seminal in tracking the development of this proper literary tradition concerning quite complex cultural relaying's, and cross-currents in cultural dialogue. In, her critique, Cara Cilano highlights how Hybrid Tapestries delineates the complicated relationship between colonial history and Pakistani English literature, bringing out its hybridity and innovative essence (Cilano 4). According to Shamsie English was used to "counter Orientalist representations and to 'modernize' their economic and cultural stakes," (Shamsie 8–9). She argues that Pakistani English literature looks very promising as that much-needed intermediate culture which can bridge cultures and ensure proper communication leading to understanding and, eventually, dialogue on a global scale

Pakistani literature in English continues to be one of the most vibrant and globally significant parts of that tradition, through works that enrich not only Pakistan's cultural and literary landscape but also the bigger discussion of world literature, by constantly exploring an array of themes, innovative stylistic approaches, and a focus on global concerns.

1.2 Pakistani Poetry in English

Pakistani English poetry constitutes an important element of the country's literary output, fusing local concerns with global poetic traditions; developing through ever-widening cultural diversity and competing historical narratives within which it also seeks to express universal human experience. Pakistani English poetry has received a great deal of critical attention from scholars and critics who have tended to view its thematic concerns, stylistic innovations, and cultural implications in detail.

In poetry, Taufiq Rafat played a key role in promoting a unique "Pakistani idiom" in English verse that would represent local experience and linguistic texture (Rafat 14). Later poets were able to tackle regional topics without undermining the expressive potential of the English language because to his appeal for cultural authenticity.

Alamgir Hashmi is recognized as a renowned poet. Hashmi's poetry frequently functions as a palimpsest, capturing the various dimensions of South Asian culture and history. Amra Raza argues, Hashmi's poems are "filled with spaces which are layered in terms of historical and cultural inscription, erasure and restoration," demonstrating his ability to rebuild the subcontinent's complex sociocultural experience (Raza 26).

Hashmi reinterpreted hallowed locations while delving into religious and political concerns. Raza adds that he "draws on Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim scriptural Spaces as a frame of reference and then re-explores them to construct humanist space," which enhances his poetry's reach without undermining the importance of religious traditions. (Raza 27). Furthermore, Hashmi uses "rhetorical questions, metaphors, and alliteration to enhance colonial critique" (Ahmed 17).

Agha Shahid Ali belonging to Kashmiri culture, his poetry also fits into the structures of Pakistani English literature because exile, memory, and the common cultural heritage of South Asia are among its central concerns. Gautam Jani in his article, "Agha Shahid Ali and the Form of Ghazal: Shahid's Contribution to Ghazal Writing in English." highlights Ali's role in introducing and adapting the ghazal to Western literary traditions, emphasizing his influence on contemporary poetry. Furthermore, Akhter Habib Shah in his article, where Ali's poems are the subject of a semiotic analysis, focuses on issues of cultural memory, identity, and exile. He laments how Ali's writing functions as a cultural relic, mirroring the intricacies of the Kashmiri diaspora and the poet's own moving experiences (Shah 265).

The feminist themes in Pakistani English poetry generally discuss gender-related issues. Some other primary topics are gender discrimination, suppression through patriarchy, and the rights of women. Some of the poets are Kishwar Naheed. The association is with the creation of literature that gives a voice to women, repudiating traditional social norms concerning system of life in Pakistani society, which is deeply based on patriarchal structures. For instance, the poem *We Sinful Women* by Naheed celebrates and embodies the struggles and achievements of women who resist patriarchy. In turn, Riaz paints a powerful picture that captures the plight of marginalized women within her piece (*The Dream of a Dead Woman* 2018). According to Gao He and

Rukhsana Iftikhar (He and Iftikhar 47) the poetry of Kishwar Naheed is well known for its fearless opposition to Pakistani societal injustice and patriarchal conventions. In Naheed's poetry serves as resistance literature, confronting patriarchal concerns and raising awareness of women's rights in Pakistani society, similarly, in *The Friday Times*, Inaam Nadeem commends Naheed for her bravery, pointing out that her poetry continues to be a powerful voice of defiance and hope during trying times (Nadeem).

The thematic and stylistic range of Pakistani literature has been especially broadened by female poets who write in English. The diaspora writer Moniza Alvi examined identity and cultural dualism, poetically expressing the conflicts between heritage and displacement (Alvi 23). By combining themes of history, religion, and gendered identity through lyrical verse, Shadab Zeest Hashmi's Baker of Tarifa and Kohl and Chalk have advanced feminist discourse (Hashmi 57).

More recently, modern poets like Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz have started using creative literary forms and perspectives to express the ordinary lives of Pakistani women. Beyond protest, their poetry quietly challenges patriarchal systems, frequently voicing what Bell hooks refers to as the "silenced center" of female experience (hooks 15). Their work enacts what Chandra Talpade Mohanty refers to as the "contextualization of women's experiences," exposing the overlapping oppressions of gender, class, and cultural expectation by capturing the emotional and intellectual interiority of bold women—both as poetic subjects and as poet-narrators (Mohanty 72).

Pakistani English poetry has developed into a forum for female agency and identity reconfiguration; this study highlights such poetry as a critical intervention in the larger literary conversation. Because of this, these poets actively reshape Pakistani literature in addition to reflecting its development.

1.3 Rationale for Selection of Texts

In her book *The Shadow of Longing and Other Poems*, Pakistan poet and lecturer at the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, Fatima Ijaz painstakingly engages the complexities of emotion. Her poetry unravels the heavy social and cultural expectations that lead to dramatic pain and suffering for women in Asian societies. Despair fear and melancholy sink deep into the female soul, catalyzed by strong cultural

pressures on motherhood and marriage. Through Ijaz's poems, readers powerfully experience catharsis, dwelling profoundly into unspoken emotions and social challenges. Her poetry narrates not only a conflict within the women but also becomes an avenue for personal and cultural exploration with an evocative portrayal of strikingly universal female experiences under Pakistani culture, a revelation echoed by readers.

In a different but equally poignant register, Seher Hashmi in her collection *Othered* foreground's themes of women's identity, resistance, and social relations. Often critically examining gender definitions and norms established for their oppression, her poetry has also played a vital role in the emancipation and equalizing of sexes. The raw intensity with which she approaches human experience speaks to honesty and vulnerability. Personal perception and incisive cultural critique enable her to create poetry that simultaneously enables readers to unravel socially constructed phenomena while simultaneously celebrating individuality. These two poets are illustrative of what literature in our time can do to reflect and reshape the world through powerful and authentic expression.

1.4 Thesis Statement

Feminist literary discourse in South Asia has extensively engaged with Urdu and diasporic voices, it has largely overlooked the complex feminist expressions emerging from contemporary Pakistani English poetry. In particular, the works of Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi who portrays audacious women resisting patriarchal norms within localized sociocultural contexts remain critically underexplored. This study examines how their poetry constructs and articulates audacious women's identities, thereby contributing to and reshaping the discourse of social feminism in Pakistan.

1.5 Research Questions

1. In what ways do Hashmi and Ijaz integrate the themes of social feminism, such as gender equality, women's rights, and societal norms in their selected works?
2. How does the poetry of Hashmi and Ijaz subvert ingrained gender roles and stereotypes to give audacious women a voice for reclaiming their stories and assert their agency?

3. How does poetic expression contribute towards reshaping the cultural views of women's roles and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society?

1.6 Objectives of the Study

- To determine how Hashmi and Ijaz's poetry defies patriarchal conventions and established gender roles in Pakistani culture.
- To investigate the ways in which the poetry of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz portrays audacious women's identities.
- To examine how women's agency is reclaimed and empowerment is achieved through the use of poetic language.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the expanding discussion on feminist literary critique by concentrating on a notably neglected genre of Pakistani literature, contemporary English poetry written by women in Pakistan. While Urdu feminist have received a lot of scholarly attention, English-language poets like Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi are still mainly ignored in academic circles. By examining how their poetry negotiates topics of gender equality, female autonomy, and opposition to patriarchal conventions, this study fills that crucial vacuum. The study explores how these poets create audacious female identities by utilizing feminist frameworks from Bell hooks, including the concepts of intersectionality and voice, as well as Chandra Talpade Mohanty's theories on contextualized women's experiences and triple marginalization. Their poetry shows how artistic expression can function as a vehicle for social critique and change by not only challenging prevailing narratives but also giving voice to underrepresented groups. In order to broaden the focus of national literary studies and support more inclusive, multilingual feminist scholarship, this study is noteworthy for its attempt to validate English poetry as an important forum for feminist discourse in Pakistan.

1.8 Delimitation

The delimitation of this study sets the scope and limitations by examining the poetry collections *The Shade of Longing and other poems* by Fatima Ijaz and *Othered* by

Seher Hashmi within social feminist paradigms of Pakistani society. The work analysis and interprets specific poems drawn from the primary texts in the context of their contributions toward understanding Social Feminist perspectives in Pakistani literature.

1.9 Structure of the Study

This research study is proposed to have five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the selected poems and poets; discussed the topic of the research along with the research questions and objectives, it also highlighted the significance of the study. Moreover, it gave an overview of the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 2 demonstrated a literature Review, where critical and comparative analysis made regarding feminist issues in Pakistani poetry with an emphasis on the contributions of Pakistani poets writing in Urdu and English.

Chapter 3 develops the research methodology and theoretical framework. It design selection criteria for the study of poems and elaborates on the feminist and postcolonial perspectives upon which the analysis chapter is based.

Chapter 4 critically analyzes the selected poems through the theoretical frameworks developed in earlier chapters. It explores how these literary works engage with themes of resistance, gender, voice, and identity.

Chapter 5 summed up the main findings of the poem analysis and looked at how they apply to feminist and literary studies. It also gives possible paths for more research on Pakistani English poetry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to fill the research gap by outlining the existing literature and highlighting the different approaches and perspectives taken by scholars and critics on the key dimensions of this study.

2.1 Social Feminism

Social feminism arose toward the end of the 19th century as a synthesis between feminist theory and socialist theory. This feminism held that gender equality would not be real until economic equality and class struggles were also resolved. Socialist feminist early thinkers were grounded in Marxist thought, which provided an intellectual framework stressing the primacy of labor, class, and economic systems in social relations. Therefore, they argued that the struggle for women's rights should be integrated into broader struggles for economic justice (Freedman 78). Social feminism thus emerged to illustrate working-class women's dual oppression: first, as workers within a capitalist economy; second, as women in a patriarchal culture (Davis 33). According to Angela Davis, social feminism addresses the intersections of racial and class oppression in addition to women's rights. In order to strive for greater social fairness, early feminist activists frequently worked inside socialist and communist movements. Davis notes that it was challenging to match feminist objectives with broader social movements since these movements occasionally ignored racial issues or gave class conflict precedence over gender equality. The evolution of social feminism as a political philosophy aiming to address several types of oppression at once was influenced by this intersectional tension (Davis 33).

Merging the concepts of socialism and feminism, social feminism offered a wider lens through which to view and critique the social and economic structures that perpetuated gender inequality. It set forth goals beyond mere suffrage-the structural issues of poverty, low wages, and inadequate education and healthcare. According to Johanna Brenner's work on socialist feminism, women's oppression has deep roots in both patriarchal and capitalist systems, suggesting a political theory that simultaneously

encounters both (Brenner 10). Moreover highlights that in order to completely comprehend the variety of oppressive experiences that women have, socialist feminism needs to take into account overlapping elements like race, ethnicity, and nationality. She criticizes neoliberal feminism for emphasizing collective action to change social and economic institutions rather than concentrating too much on individual empowerment within capitalism frameworks. (Brenner 12). Brenner also explores how modern feminist politics interact with the restructuring of global capitalism, contending that socialist feminist reactions to neoliberal policies have been increasingly influenced by working-class women's groups (Brenner 14-15).

Jean Bethke Elshtain was one of the leading social feminists, and she greatly contributed to the establishment of the profession of social work in the United States. She thereby sustained immigrant and working-class communities through her efforts at Hull House in Chicago; this is how she came to advocate for women's participation in politics as well as social reform. Her work embodies the core values of social feminism—resolving both gender and class-based injustices. In her influential book Public Man, Private Woman, Jean Bethke Elshtain examines the idea of social feminism as a framework that questions the rigid division between the public and private domains. Social feminism aims to change societal structures to favor traditionally "feminine" responsibilities like caring for others, nurturing, and household work, in contrast to radical or liberal feminism, which frequently attempts to abolish or dismantle conventional roles. According to Elshtain, social feminists seek to change male-dominated fields by introducing ideals related to women's traditional duties, rather than just allowing women to enter them on male terms. This involves promoting in political discourse the ethical and social importance of caregiving and civic duty (Elshtain 92). Furthermore, social feminism critiques both the individualism of liberal political theory and patriarchal domination, promoting an ethical and relational model of social life that places an emphasis on reciprocal reliance and accountability (Elshtain 92).

Florence Kelley, a social reformer and social feminist, shared the stance of social feminism. She urged legislation to restrict working hours and ensure wage conditions for women; she believed in the economic aspects of gender inequality. In that view, Charlotte Perkins Gilman highlighted that it was imperative for women to become

economically independent from men. Traditional gender roles have placed constraints on women's access to opportunities and sustained inequality; a major element of those constraints was economic dependence (Gilman 5-6). Together these thinkers and activists laid the foundation for a feminist approach that transcends individual rights to address the social and economic conditions shaping women's lives.

Intersectionality is the main avenue of social feminism. It opens the view that women's lives are traversed and battered by the cumulative and intersecting impacts of multiple oppressions—gender, race, class, and ethnicity (Crenshaw 140). Rather than a mono vision of the struggles of women, intersectionality asks for a more nuanced understanding of varied and complex experiences faced by women in different social and economic positions.

Social feminists, in turn, advocate economic justice as they support wage equality and labor opportunities where a woman can earn a living with dignity. Apart from reforming the workplace, they demand other social reforms healthcare, housing, education, and public services primarily for women who are otherwise marginalized Social feminism also promotes community and solidarity; under it, women are encouraged to organize themselves collectively with smaller or larger support systems that may enhance or direct social change.

Different streams have evolved within social feminism, all emphasizing unique aspects of the woman's socio-economic ordeal. Labor feminism is one that speaks about the rights of women in the world of work. It means equal pay for similar work, working conditions to free from danger, and equal opportunities to be granted to men as well (Cobble 33). Welfare feminism pinpoints good social welfare policies that would uphold and support women and their families like childcare, health care, and social security (Orloff 303). Ecofeminism establishes a direct relationship between the domination of women and the degradation of nature and in return it calls for sustainable development along with environmental equity (Mies and Shiva 45). Intersectional feminism deals with the effect of various social stratifications such as race, class, and sexuality on gender-based forms of oppression. It provides an intellectual zest into the ordeal of women (Collins 18).

2.2 Feminism in Pakistani Literature

Pakistan's socio-political changes and the ongoing fight for women's rights are reflected in the several stages of feminism's development in Pakistani literature. Modern authors that continue to question patriarchal conventions and promote gender equality have built upon the feminist discourse established by early literary works. Many people point to Ahmed Ali's groundbreaking novel *Twilight in Delhi*, which quietly criticizes the patriarchal systems of Muslim society in the early 20th century. Ali illustrates the limitations placed on women by means of characters such as Bilqees, emphasizing their restricted autonomy within a conventional framework (Rahman 112). Similar to this, Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories, including "Khol Do" and "Thanda Gosht," highlight the interplay of violence, sexuality, and gender oppression while confronting the harsh reality that women suffered during the Partition.

In Pakistani literature, feminist ideas were advanced in large part by the Progressive writers Movement. Women's empowerment and gender inequity were topics covered by authors like as Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Ismat Chughtai. Chughtai's short fiction "*Lihaaf*" (The Quilt) sparked controversy and praise because it questioned social taboos around female sexuality.

Pakistani women writers have persisted in examining feminist themes in recent decades, frequently referencing their own experiences as well as social views. *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the effects of political unrest on women's life by providing a moving account of the Partition through the eyes of a young girl named Lenny. Similar to this, *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz explores the intricacies of female liberty in a medieval society, highlighting Zarri Bano's struggle against restrictive customs.

In Urdu poetry, poets such as Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz have played a significant role in expressing feminist viewpoints. The poem "We Sinful Women" by Naheed, which affirmed women's rights to autonomy and self-expression, came to represent the feminist movement in Pakistan. Both critical praise and political persecution resulted from Riaz's writing, which frequently challenged social standards and addressed themes of sexuality and female empowerment.

The feminist discourse in Pakistani literature is still being expanded by modern authors. Short stories by Bina Shah, including “The Wedding of Sundari,” examine the difficulties women encounter in balancing conventional norms with contemporary goals (Shah). In the South Asian setting, Soniah Kamal’s writings also touch on topics like identity, marriage, and female autonomy.

Feminism is understood differently around the world, with different interpretations in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. India and Pakistan do not have a specific narrative like that in Western countries, but there are differences in the perception, interpretation, and implementation of feminism. In Pakistan, there are several books in English that discuss these themes, including *Faith and Feminism in Pakistan* 2018 by Afiya Shehrbano Zia and *Navigating Pakistani Feminism* by Aisha Sarwari. (Sarwari 45) However, few serious attempts have been made to examine feminism in Urdu literature and the broader social context of these regions.

Umera Ahmed’s novel *Meri Zaat Zar-e-Benishan* vividly depicts the struggles women face within the deteriorating patriarchal structures of Pakistani society. Deniz Kandiyoti describes Pakistan as part of a region characterized by “classic patriarchy,” where rigid gender roles permeate the social structure (Kandiyoti 278). “Classical patriarchy” refers to a social framework in which men hold primary power and authority, while women are subordinate. This structure enforces strict gender norms and expectations, severely restricting women’s autonomy and perpetuating inequality.

In early Pakistani literature, women were often portrayed as mere tools for service and pleasure, vulnerable to various forms of suffering imposed on them by their male masters. They were burdened with cultural expectations rooted in post-colonialism. Tahmina Durrani’s (*My Feudal Lord* 1994) reflects the dire plight of women under feudal tyranny. Despite socio-economic stability, Durrani’s happiness was not guaranteed. Her autobiographical novel openly depicts the plight of married women, detailing their transformation from submissiveness to agency as their femininity is endlessly exploited in the name of marriage and legitimized through religious and cultural discourse. Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing* (2003) highlights the struggle of female characters against the

patriarchal conventions of Pakistani society and deconstructs the image of women in which their sexuality and fidelity are attributed only to their husbands.

Pakistani literature thus expresses the collective silence of women through the ongoing social urgency of women's activism. Social and literary expressions can be an avenue for fostering an indigenous form of feminism that maintains its sublimity across time and space.

2.3 Pakistani Poetry in English

Pakistani poetry in English holds a prominent, yet frequently underrepresented, place in the country's literary heritage. It arose from the postcolonial setting and captures the internal conflicts and contradictions of gender, class, language, and identity in addition to the nation's sociopolitical changes. From the early voices of the Pakistani literary diaspora to the more recent rise of indigenous poets writing in Pakistan, English poetry from Pakistan has developed into a vibrant form of feminist and cultural expression.

The foundation for a unique literary culture in English was first established by authors such as Taufiq Rafat, Daud Kamal, and Alamgir Hashmi, who influenced Pakistani English poetry. These poets struggled with identity, cultural displacement, and the ambiguous character of postcolonial life. Rafat's attempt to ground his poetry in native landscapes and sensitivities made his contribution to "Pakistani idiom" in English poetry especially noteworthy (Shamsie 47). Alamgir Hashmi also made significant academic contributions to the English-language definition of Pakistani literature, arguing that it should be viewed as a separate field of study rather than a subset of Indian or British literature (Hashmi 26).

As time passed by, the genre grew to encompass a wider range of voices, especially those of women poets who started to express issues that had previously been ignored or marginalized. The rise of feminist poets like Shadab Zeest Hashmi, Moniza Alvi, and Imtiaz Dharker in English poetry has brought gender, identity, displacement, and agency to the forefront. Despite the fact that some of these poets are diasporic, South Asian women's cultural struggles and gendered conflicts are strongly reflected in their work. For instance, Dharker challenges patriarchal interpretations of female sexuality and

identity in her poems by examining the body as a location of negotiation and resistance (Anwar 89).

Taufiq Rafat, one of the leading English-language poets of Pakistan, is acclaimed for his individual poetic voice that expresses Pakistani identity, culture, and landscape. His work draws its sustenance very deeply from native imagery and is able to convey a strong ecological awareness. In it, scholars like Rasheed and Aqeel (2022) state that monsoon arrival and half-moon are poems "Eco poetic critique," environmental degradation; seasonal change provides ground for aesthetic appreciation of nature. Such cultural consciousness runs equally deep in him. (Shah 2024) for instance found that nationalism and Pakistani identity pride are dominant themes in Rafat's poems.

Nevertheless, despite these poets' contributions, there is still a dearth of scholarly research on Pakistani English poetry composed by women in Pakistan. Modern poets that write from within Pakistan's intricate sociopolitical fabric, such as Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi, are starting to be recognized for their nuanced yet potent literary statements. To express women's resistance to patriarchy, their work frequently eschews overt slogans in favor of symbolic, psychological, and affective elements. A new direction in Pakistani English poetry is marked by this internalization and creative reworking of feminist issues, one that broadens the focus of feminist discourse beyond conventional dichotomies (Khan 311).

By challenging gender norms, recovering suppressed histories, and envisioning different futures, such poetry provides crucial interventions in reshaping Pakistani women's identities. The growing popularity of English poetry in Pakistan provides a forum for the "audacious" expression of women's voices, especially those reimagining social feminism in a localized and nuanced way.

This study specifically deals with the work of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz, two contemporary poets, whose work has not been much reviewed concerning social feminism. In doing so, it helps fill a gap that has overlooked the contributions of women poets in Pakistani feminist literature.

Fatima Ijaz's *Shades of Longing and Other Poems* is a significant addition to Pakistani literature for its overt feminist commitment to the redefinition of socio-cultural

paradigms. Accounts serve to reflect the experiences of audacious women in individual and collective settings; they also serve to disentangle and, in the end, substitute some social aesthetics and even call for change. Several interviews with her have uncovered critical input from literary works, feminist views, and social issues concerning which she writes her poetry, which bring out their view of literature as a force for change. During her interview with The Express Tribune broadcasted online, Ijaz would hint at her poetic impulse reflecting voices at the fringe and their struggles, through her words, “My poetry seeks to amplify suppressed voices, particularly the voices of marginalized women, while shedding light on their respective issues. Through my poetry, I wish to challenge existing stereotypes as well as provide a platform through which the voices of women could find a way into existence”. In an interview with Dawn, she shares some personal experiences, putting them in dialogue and at times in tension with broader social issues, and presents her poetry as a narrative journey touching on themes of desire, justice, and equality. All these speak to the use of poetry that Ijaz is committed to: poetry as a vehicle for attaining social justice and empowerment.

Rukhsana Ahmed lauds the poems of Ijaz for delving into themes that are so fundamentally feminist with courage. Writing a review in the Pakistani Journal of Literature, Scholar Rukhsana Ahmed wrote, “Fatima Ijaz makes a significant contribution to contemporary feminist literature through her social commentary in poetic expression”. The discussions at literary forums and academic conferences invariably highlight not just the content of Ijaz’s poems, but their actual impact on feminist discourse as well as their function in issues connected to the liberation of women and social justice within Pakistan.

Sehar Hashmi’s poetry collection *Othered* is a testament to her valuable contribution to Pakistani feminist literature. Hashmi writes in stark imagery and verse on the themes of marginalization, identity, and resistance with palpable commitment toward social change and gender equality. Scholarly validation and critical reception, therefore, have noted the significant impact of her work in promoting feminist discourse and voicing the concerns of the marginalized community. This is where she would later reflect that the motivation behind her work was to carefully provide an avenue for voices at the fringes, saying “My poetry is intended to highlight and give voice to narratives of women whose very stories often leave them on the ‘other’ side of society”. During the

2018 Karachi Literary Festival, she furthered this theme by detailing her approach toward writing and the message behind her collection, *Othered*, within a forum that advocated for social change through literature.

2.4 Feminist Poetry in Pakistan

It began with feminist poetry - a force that has shaken social norms and pressed for the rights of women in Pakistan. It focuses on all such challenges, resilience, and strength gained by women in a purely patriarchal set-up. Many poets work from this movement, showcasing such issues as inequality, oppression, and even identity. Shamsie refers to it as a portrayal of one gender's plight in a male-dominated society (Shamsie 112). Through extensive writing, Riaz does just that; she shows the interlocking systems of feminist concerns, how the socioeconomic and cultural structures relate to the gender-based oppression (Riaz 45). This study, therefore, denotes and reinforces the transformative power that feminist poetry can have in fighting for social justice and gender equity in Pakistan.

Fehmida Riaz is a leading voice in Urdu poetry reinforces feminist perspectives through her collection of poetry, *Badan Dareeda* (The Torn Body), in which she criticizes patriarchy and advocates for women's autonomy and empowerment. As Jalil points out, "Riaz's poetry is a powerful indictment of the patriarchal structures that restrict women" (Jalil 45). She passionately criticizes society's expectations of women and questions the idea that they are passive recipients. Khan states in an article that "Riaz's work consistently emphasizes women's struggle against society's oppressive norms" (Khan 78).

Parveen Shakir is known for her poetic explorations of love and femininity, and for her critique of social expectations and challenging gender stereotypes through series such as *Khushbu* (fragrance). Her poetry reflects a nuanced understanding of women's experiences and desires and articulates a feminist perspective rooted in personal and social liberation (Hashmi 56; Hussain 87). Known for its emotional depth and lyrical beauty, Shakir's work offers a critical look at the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society and advocates for women's autonomy and self-expression (Khan 34; Jalal 99).

In regional literature, Kishwar Nasheed's poetry, especially in Urdu and Punjabi, challenges patriarchal traditions and celebrates the resilience and strength of women. Her work *Lab-e-Goya* (Speaking lips) takes a bold feminist perspective, calling for women's voices to be recognized and valued in a male-dominated society. Nasheed's work embodies the intersection between poetry and activism, using poetry as a tool for social change and gender equality (Ali 45, Shaheen 102). Many have noted that her poetry not only challenges social norms but also empowers women by celebrating their inherent strength and agency (Haq 133, Ahmed 78).

2.5 Feminist Poetry in English

Pakistani women poets have traditionally emphasized women's agency, body and voice reclamation, and resistance to patriarchy, whether they write in English or translate Urdu verse. Poets who write in Urdu, such as Kishwar Naheed and Parveen Shakir, have attracted audiences worldwide through while some, like, Zehra Nigah, and Fehmida Riaz, as well as Pakistani-American poets, such Shadab Zeest Hashmi and Tarfia Faizullah. These poets challenge traditional roles and gender inequality openly. Regarding Naheed's career, one critic, I.A Rehman in an online review published on July 9, 2020 observes that her poetry is "marked by… a feminist touch" even in classical forms, as well as by a general "defiance of curbs on freedom". According to Khalique, Naheed proudly refers to Pakistani authors as the "arch feminist poets" who continue "the struggle for individual liberties."

Khalique says in an interview published on April 25, says that Kishwar Naheed is recognized as Pakistan's "arch feminist poet". She started off writing ghazals before becoming well-known for her free-verse nazms that represent the hardships faced by all women. Naheed's poetry challenges patriarchal conventions in translation. Her most well-known poem, "We Sinful Women" for instance, boldly states: "We sinful women are the ones who don't fold our hands together or bow our heads." (ln 3 4). Naheed directly or indirectly, reclaim women's bodies and voices: she talks about how tyranny cut off "tongues which could speak," but she also declares that "these eyes shall not be put out" (ln 15). In the discussion of Pakistani female poets, Rukhsana Ahmed in *We Sinful Women* illustrates Kishwar Naheed as a "feminist who poses serious threat to men

through her work, her lifestyle, her manner and through ceaseless verbal challenge. She does this with a professional dedication which either endears or enrages, there are no half measures". Ahmed considers the idea that Kishwar Naheed's poetry breaks the typical structure of poem not only at semantic level but also at stylistic level as well. Kishwar Naheed's poems have been analyzed earlier from various different perspectives. According to Rukhsana Ahmad's translation, this refrain has evolved into a feminist resistance. I. A. Rehman notes in a review, published on July 9, 2020 says that Naheed's later work continuously shifts from individual resentment to group protest; "the thread running through all poems is defiance of curbs on freedom," reflecting the efforts of women as well as those of the general populace. In support of "the universal struggle for equality, justice, and freedom," Naheed herself states that poets "never let down the oppressed". In her later years, she created poetry that tackle national and international injustices from a female perspective and translated important feminist works, including Beauvoir's sex.

In "Impure Women Marginality and Detachment in the poetry of Kishwar Naheed," Arshad Masood Hashmi evaluates and questions the legitimacy of laws, whether Sharia laws or social hones which dishonor women, and realize that both the systems of values belittle and imprison women in their cage of oppression. It appears that Kishwar Naheed in composing poetry that dependably depicted women as existing on the edges of their common public, is playing an active role in their social restoration. Hashmi demonstrates that "Naheed's poetry has always been seen as a threat to the patriarchal order in society"

Moreover, Pakistani women are penning original or translated poetry in English. These poets frequently traverse cultural boundaries to discuss gender and identity. Pakistani-American poet Shadab Zeest's poetry combines feminist sentiments, Islamic themes, and history. One critic Hashmi says in his article that, "Many of her poems explore… Islam and are described as reflecting an essentially feminist tradition of Pakistani writing in English,"

Furthermore, Pakistani-American poet Tarfia Faizullah is well-known for her collection which draws inspiration from the Bangladesh Liberation War. She claims that

her verses were inspired Bari in her review published on 23 march, 2023 says that “from a need to imagine the experiences of the two million women who were raped by [the] Pakistani army during the Bangladesh Liberation War,” despite having Bangladeshi ancestry. Her work effectively addresses Pakistani abuses. Faizullah has received accolades and been taught all around the world for his moving war poetry, which is based on feminist testimonies. Young English-language poets like Bushra Farrukh tackle gender and identity in Pakistan and investigate the difficulties facing Pakistani women.

Women’s autonomy, voice, and resistance are always highlighted in Pakistani feminist poetry, whether it is translated or written in the original English. Old silences were broken by the Urdu poems of Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz, while Parveen Shakir's gave them lyrical delicacy. This tradition is carried on into modern English by poets like Faizullah, who continue to question patriarchy, stand up for women’s rights, and reclaim women's bodies and narratives for the poetic stage.

Feminist Poetry in English, written by Pakistani poets, has slowly taken shape as the political, cultural, and historical landscapes continue to change. It is an expression that finds its grounding in the early postcolonial period articulating a nation’s quest for self-identity amidst strong vestiges of colonial memory and native tradition. Scholars describe Pakistani Anglophone poetry as being “in its formative phase” wherein newer poets are still striving to stake a claim for this place of literature (Mansoor 20). Pioneers like Alamgir Hashmi did not just write great poems; they also framed the critique which would help in elevating Pakistani English literature into an academic discipline (“Pakistani Poetry in English”). Only recently, Fatimah Asghar and Moniza Alvi added newness to the scope of themes by taking diasporic issues, gender issues, memories. Moniza Alvi and Fatimah Asghar broadened thematic concerns in Pakistani English poetry through these three themes “Contemporary Pakistani Literature” This developing poetic scene shows the active link between words, culture, and country in modern Pakistan.

Attiya Dawood’s poetic work belongs to the tradition of feminist resistance and social critique through which the plight of women in Sindhi-speaking areas of Pakistan is depicted. Dawood’s poems, translated into English, German, and Hindi, helps her

message reach people all over the world. The international project *Poets Translating Poets* by Goethe-Institute included her poetry, with which it illuminated “The People of the Machine," a clear example of her mixture of political consciousness and lyricism (“Attiya Dawood,” Goethe-Institute). While her work invites comparisons to feminist poetry movements globally, it is uniquely grounded in the socio-cultural fabric of Sindh. With topics like bodily autonomy, female identity, and collective trauma, she turns poetry into a platform for justice. Her poetry can be very explicit about gender-based violence, honor killings, and the silencing of women within rural patriarchal societies. She writes from personal experience as well as collective memory, her verses document and challenge oppression. In “Raging to Be Free”, translated by Asif Aslam Farrukhi, her poems express both rage and resilience finally giving voice to those silenced women of history. “Bold, different defiant feminist,” Farrukhi described her uniqueness not just in Sindhi literature but a challenge to it. (Ragging to be free 1)

Nadia Anjum is immensely important too because her works Disquietude and Woman. Woman foregrounds those varied experiences of the ‘Third World woman’ by celebrating multiple identities which fall outside Western stereotyping as well as local patriarchy. She also traces ‘the re incarnation of female individuality’, according to Qurat ul Ain Khalil and Saima Khan’s observation, basing it on post-colonialism plus feminism thereby offering alternative narratives for Pakistani womanhood.

Shahbano Bilgrami simultaneously delivers a piercing critique of the educational and domestic expectations set in her poetry. Academic attention toward studying her work has been relatively low, but it speaks to assertiveness in women’s personal agency over patriarchal impositions (Bilgrami).

Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, famous for her Urdu and Punjabi verses wrote in English, sharing strong political verses revealing economic exploitation while confronting the commodification of women through patriarchy. As recalled in Dawn, Bhatti strongly challenged the way “patriarchy reduced women to a commodity,” syncing her voice with feminist demands for political and economic autonomy (“Nasreen Anjum Bhatti”).

These poets add depth to Pakistani feminist discourse by defining local and transnational identities, expressing opposition to male dominance, and reaffirming women's agency—and they clearly deserve greater scholarly attention.

The work of Shamshad Khan falls within this tradition. Hers is a diasporic voice articulating exile and trauma, speaking of gendered strength. Her presence in feminist collections such as Healing Strategies for Women at War marks her dedication to the narration of struggle and survival by South Asian women.

Fatima Ijaz's poetry often addresses the themes of marginalization, particularly the struggles women face in a patriarchal society. Her debut collection, *The Shade of Longing and Other Poems* (2021), explores these themes through emotional complexity and personal memory. During an interview to Karvan, Ijaz said her poetry is "uncensored, lyrical expression" through which she can articulate emotions and experiences that remain unspoken (Ijaz *karvan*) this is clearly seen in her poetry where memory and identity are used as themes. She writes: "The past, like a second love, simmers alive in the dark." This shows how history can haunt us and its strong bearing on the present (Ijaz t*he News International*). These two aspects — memory and identity are very much connected with the experiences of marginalized women whose histories have often been overlooked or deliberately silenced.

Ijaz has taken part in events like the Karachi Literature Festival where she talks about how important different types of people are in writing, which also supports the idea of adding women's experiences to literary talks. This is shown in her work, which helps much with contemporary feminist literature through emotional depth and focus on identities that are not at the center.

The works of Urdu poets like Kishwar Naheed, Fehmida Riaz, and Parveen Shakir have placed feminist poetry from Pakistan under considerable scholarly attention more so in translated anthologies like We Sinful Women (Ahmad), yet the contemporary voices of feminists writing in English remain almost untouched by criticism. Thus, present academic discussions often leave out these poets writing in English whose works challenge patriarchal aesthetic norms and address complex issues related to gender and identity from localized experiences that speak to global concerns. That gap is particularly

visible Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi whose works are very less analyzed by scholars despite the fact that their poetry should be situated as a carrier of new waves of feminism consciousness which articulate audacious women's lived experience and breaking the silence in which they may be living. Their poetry not only critiques marginalization but also reclaims narrative spaces for women in Pakistani English literature. The present study attempts to fill this gap by critically analyzing how these two poets negotiate and resists gendered constraints to create and shape feminist literary expression in Pakistan.

The literature review shows that existing research focuses mainly on themes such as trauma, memory, identity development, cultural expression, and social criticism. This study is the first to focus on the identity of 'audacious' women from a social feminist perspective. Unlike other assessments that may mention feminist elements, this study is distinguished by focusing on contemporary poets who have not been widely studied, emphasizing the role of poetry in social activism. This study fills the research gap found in the existing literature by analyzing in detail how these poets use their works to challenge patriarchal structures and advocate for women's rights in the specific sociocultural context of Pakistan. In this way, the study adds to the greater evolutionary impetus of feminist literature in Pakistan and its bearing upon cultural perceptions and social change.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the research design, theoretical framework and the analytical structure for the analysis carried out on the selected works.

3.1 Research Design

The study is placed within the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research that seeks to understand how individuals and groups construct meaning in their social and cultural contexts. Since this study is based on exploring the identities of audacious women in contemporary Pakistani poetry, it adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach.

As the aim of the study is to examine how female identity is constructed discursively, how audacious women are represented, their empowerment or resistance through the language of Fatima Ijaz's and Seher Hashmi's poems; a qualitative approach allows for a critical reading of the poems in terms of Pakistani society's gender norms; can help reveal how power, voice, and resistance are encoded in poetic discourse.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpins the entire study by highlighting key concepts that guide its analysis. It is essentially grounded in social feminist thought and draws more critically from the writings of bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Elisabeth Armstrong who mainly articulated important concepts of intersectionality, marginality, and resistance in feminist discourse. Their theories will be applied to analyze critically the poetry of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz within an analytical frame concerning issues such as gender inequality, women's rights, and related cultural norms regarding women's status in Pakistani society. This framework provides an opportunity to explore how poets construct audacious women who challenge patriarchal constraints and claim their agency within socio-cultural constraints. Engaging with the feminist insights of hooks, Mohanty and Armstrong, it is shown how poetic discourse may be as

a site of resistance and empowerment for women negotiating multiple structures of oppression.

Drawing on the works of the above-mentioned theorists, the key terms of the study are as follows:

3.2.1 Intersectionality

The theoretical framework of this study draws from bell hooks' concept of intersectionality, an essential element in probing the complex experiences of women at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression. There, hooks critiques narrow feminist movements that separate gender from other axes of identity; "there can be no feminist movement without a radical critique of capitalism and racism" (hooks 6), this point to a holistic approach to oppression relevant in Pakistan where gender discrimination interlinks with religious, cultural, and class-based inequalities. Therefore, the framework of hooks provides a crucial lens through which Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi's poetry may be analyzed in an attempt to reveal how these poets articulate experiences by social forces that overlap.

hooks argues that every meaningful feminist analysis "must recognize that race, class, gender and sexual oppression work together to constitute a synergistic matrix of domination" (hooks 24). This helps unpack how the poems construct the identities of audacious women — who resist not only patriarchy but also other structures intersecting with it in their endeavor to silence or marginalize them. By highlighting intersectionality, this study positions these poets' works within wider feminist discourses which do not approach the category 'woman' as monolithic but struggle recognition of heterogeneity and situatedness.

hooks emphasizes the role of voice and narrative in combating oppression. She states, "For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power, it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (hooks *Talking Back* 8). This view of voice as a revolutionary act resonates deeply with the audacious women represented in Ijaz's and Hashmi's poetry. Their poetic expressions become courageous acts that question well-established

patriarchal norms and reclaim female agency in a society that habitually seeks to constrain it.

hooks stresses the need to recognize difference within feminist practice: “Without an analysis of difference, feminist politics are unable to address the needs of all women” (hooks). This principle is critical in the reading of Pakistani women poets who break monolithic representations of womanhood by expressing individual and collective identities shaped by cultural specificities. This enables the study to acknowledge the very different articulations of resistance by the poets reflecting real women trying to find their way in a heavily laden socio-political milieu.

To sum up, intersectionality as put forward by bell hooks provides a strong theoretical base for this work; it assists not only in decoding the multiple oppressions faced by women within Pakistani context but also enlightens how poetry serves as a space for audacious claims of identity, resistance, and empowerment. Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi’s voices therefore make critical interventions in feminist discourse showing how poetry can challenge dominant social norms and redefine them with articulation from intersectional experiences.

3.2.2 Voice and Agency

Voice refers to the capacity for any and all individuals, specifically those whose identities and experiences are marginalized, to express themselves and assert their views within social and cultural contexts. Through this act of voice, both individuals and communities can communicate their ideas and ensure that their experiences are recognized in the discourse-at-large and challenge dominant narratives. This is especially important in situations of marginalization, which makes the assertion of voice an act of resistance and empowerment. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that “marginalized groups, particularly in postcolonial contexts, must retrieve their voices in acts of resistance against effacement and exclusion from social narratives” (Spivak 271). This is what bell hooks would call “speaking” and she says, “is an act of resistance, speaking means asserting the value of one's voice and claiming it as a tool for liberation” (hooks 5).

On the contrary, agency is the ability to act for oneself, to make one's own decisions independently. It is freedom to determine one's life and shape it with choices embodying autonomy, without the risk of being suppressed or harassed. Agency is foundational to feminist theory because it empowers individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, to navigate oppressive systems and transform their realities. As Saba Mahmood argues, agency involves more than acting against something; rather, it means participating in and steering social structures toward concrete ends (Mahmood 14). Such a view is shared by bell hooks in explaining that real liberation results in individuals exercising their own judgment and redesigning their lives for the common good—recreating the world at large (hooks 7).

Apart from intersectionality, the theoretical framework of this study is also grounded in the concepts of voice and agency as propounded by bell hooks. According to her, voice is not simply an expression of oneself but rather it is political resistance against patriarchal, colonial, and racial systems of oppression. She states, "Only by coming to voice can we participate in the transformation of our lives and the lives of others" (*Talking Back* 40). This has awakened voice both personally and collectively—an imperative step towards empowerment and liberation.

In Pakistani society, where men do not let women speak due to shyness of talking, old beliefs of how women should act, and strict rules of culture, getting back their voice becomes a brave and challenging thing to do. For hooks, voice is very connected to the way of waking up more awareness, a feminist plan that helps people who are left out share their true stories and ask hard questions of big ideas. She argues that "when we dare to speak, to break the silence, to make ourselves known, we begin to claim a sense of agency" (*Yearning* 150). This act of speaking up goes against systems that want, need even to rely on the silence, passivity, and invisibility of women.

In this way, the poetry of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz acts not merely as a creative outlet but as resistance discourse. Their poems narrate struggles, desires, contradictions, and survival strategies of women in Pakistan negotiating women who must sometimes negotiate intersecting identities imposed by gender, class, religion, and familial constraints. These poetic voices resonate with hooks' articulation that "our words

are not without meaning. They are an action, resistance" (Talking Back 28). Whether metaphorically speaking through irony or openly narrating defiance both poets engage in narrative reclamation acts reflecting female agency in action.

In addition, hooks explain how the conditioning of women to silence is carried out: "Patriarchy requires of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successfully socialized to silence and submission, they are often punished" (*Feminist Theory* 56). This description applies so appropriately to audacious women who will be traced resisting this socialization thus embracing emotional truth and challenging power structures by insisting on visibility. In Pakistani culture female emotionality and expression are generally marked as unruly or path breaking; hence speaking becomes a radical form of self-assertion through poetry.

hooks reminds us that 'the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation' (*Talking Back* 6). In the poetic worlds of Ijaz and Hashmi, the audacious woman is one who dares to show the inside self—pain, anger, want, sadness—and faces a world that often tries to wipe away those truths. In their poems, silence is not being weak; it is a place of possible break; a space that once broken makes room for new feminist awareness.

Through an engagement with hooks' ideas, this study reads the works of Hashmi and Ijaz not merely as literary texts but as feminist interventions articulating women's agency through language. In them these poets realize or enact the belief held by hooks that "the function of art is to do more than tell it like it is, it's to imagine what is possible" (*Outlaw Culture* 238). They therefore present to us women not constrained by societal norms but bold, aware, self-defined such qualities are at the heart of this study's definition of the audacious woman.

3.2.3 Double vs. Triple Marginalization

This study is located within a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework; it draws from Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critical interventions on representation, subjectivity, and marginalization as a sturdy lens for analyzing gendered identities in literature. Mohanty's contextual, historically-situated feminism enables the present

study to see how poetic narratives by Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz reflect and challenge intersecting systems of power over women in Pakistani society.

Mohanty's notion of marginalization is informed by the tendency to universalize in Western feminist discourse. In her essay, Under Western Eyes, she writes, "The discursively consensual homogeneity of 'women' as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women" (Mohanty 64). This insight forms the base of this study which refuses simplistic images of Pakistani women and tries to excavate the multiple, layered experiences of those who are resisting dominant patriarchal, cultural, and colonial narratives through poetry.

Mohanty presents the concept of "double or triple marginalization," showing that suffering does not take place along one single dividing line but at the points where gender, class, and race meet with geopolitical location. She states, "the colonial construction of the 'third world woman' as a singular monolithic subject is crucial to the discursive strategy of domination" (Mohanty 72). The control is not just placed from outside but also creeps within through cultural and social establishments. In Pakistan, ladies are frequently sidelined by male-dominated hopes, spiritual or ethical scrutiny, and financial lowering; forming a triple tight where poetic opposition turns both needed and extreme.

Mohanty further argues that feminist politics must begin from the lived experiences and locations of marginalized women: "Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice and analysis" (Mohanty 77). Therefore, poetic voices of Hashmi and Ijaz cannot merely represent Pakistani women, but they have to articulate specific resistances grounded in their sociocultural realities. Their poems give form to what Mohanty describes as "oppositional agency," empowerment arising from within systems of oppression.

These poetic expressions are at the heart of what this study terms audacious women, a concept grounded in Mohanty's call for a nuanced understanding of agency. Audacious women, in this conceptualization, are those who assert themselves through language, imagination, and emotion within and despite constraining/oppressive systems. They are not defined by defiance alone but by a politicized self-awareness capable of

resisting erasure. As Mohanty contends, “The production of knowledge, the construction of the category of ‘women’ in particular locations, and the political implications of this construction are critical sites of struggle” (Mohanty 78).

Hashmi and Ijaz’s poetry provides a place where speech turns into an instrument of defiance, winning back room for women’s ideas, emotions, and power. Their verses match with Mohanty’s view of feminist practice as both imaginative and political. It does not merely critique patriarchal ideologies but also redefines female subjectivity in terms that foreground resilience, complexity, and the right to narrate one’s own story. It is in this way that Mohanty’s contributions to feminist theory supply a framework not only for critiquing gender oppression but also for viewing the political significance of literary expression by women. Intersectionality, marginalization, and resistance-the framework enables a profound analysis of how audacious identities are constituted, silenced, and spoken-in Pakistani women’s poetry.

3.2.4 Contextualized Women’s Experiences

A key concept in Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s feminist theory is the contextualization of women’s lives—namely, that women’s lives, struggles, and forms of resistance must be understood in relation to the specific social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. Mohanty critiques the universal tendencies of Western feminism which often essentialists Global South women as passive, oppressed, and homogenous. Rather she demands a “historically and culturally grounded” approach that sees difference, complexity, and agency within and across women’s experiences (Mohanty 42).

As Mohanty puts it “Women’s experiences are not a naturally coherent group, but rather are structured by particular histories, cultures, and political economies” (Mohanty 39). This viewpoint highlights that no feminist analysis can be complete without attention to the location of the subject. Pakistani women cannot be analyzed by using the same frameworks that have been applied to study women in the West. Their experiences are shaped by the intersections of patriarchy, religion, post-colonialism, class, and national identity; therefore, they require a lens of interpretation that is localized.

This study answers Mohanty's call for feminist analysis in context, by focusing on the poetic voices of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz who writes from inside the complex, gendered terrain of Pakistani society. Their poetry reflects not a generalized concept of female oppression, but rather intimate, culturally grounded explorations of identity, voice, resistance, and subjectivity. Indeed, it is through metaphor, language and imagery that these poets articulate what it means to be a woman negotiating intersecting systems of control and expectation.

Based on this framework, the study conceptualizes an audacious woman, who refuses to be erased or silenced; rather, she resists through acts of expression, consciousness, and creative defiance. Drawing from Mohanty's urging us to see women's agency within their own cultural and historical contexts, this study defines audacious women as those who assert their voice and agency in contexts where such expression is socially, culturally, or politically constrained. Their courage may not always manifest itself in overt activism but more so in subtle acts of survival, articulation, and even intellectual labor.

As Mohanty affirms, "Agency is not simply about resistance to domination, but also about the construction of oppositional frameworks of knowledge and the creation of alternative, radical epistemologies" (Mohanty *Feminism Without Borders*). The poetry of Hashmi and Ijaz gives us just these opposite ways- questioning main ideas about gender roles, patriotism, and rightness in Pakistan. Their work shows a type of feminist action that comes from understanding culture, having language power, and taking back the space for stories.

In this study, the audacious woman is a key player in cultural critique and change. She speaks not from theory but from the real challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated, postcolonial world. Her voice, expressed through poetry, acts as a place for both self-strengthening and pushback.

By placing the idea of the audacious woman in Mohanty's setup of related experiences, this work creates a detailed and well-based way to look at gender in Pakistani poems. It does not generalize but rather, attunes itself to a culturally responsive feminist reading where literary expression acts as both method and message.

Theoretical contributions of bell hooks and Chandra Talpade Mohanty make a very contextual frame for analyzing the complex gendered subjectivities of Seher Hashmi's and Fatima Ijaz's poetry. Hooks' voice and agency along with intersectionality show us how oppressed women strategically navigate and resist overlapping systems of domination. Contextualized experience, double and triple marginalization, and politics of representation by Mohanty will ground these resistances into historically specific cultural frameworks. Both argue for a feminist practice that takes difference into account, challenges dominant portrayals of women, and values localized forms of expression. It permits the study to see how Hashmi and Ijaz narrate bold female identities that challenge male-dominated ideologies, take back narrative space, and show the real difficulties of women's lives in today's Pakistani community. Together, hooks and Mohanty allow us to read poetry not just as a form of writing but as a powerful way of feminist resistance and cultural critique.

3.2.5 Economic Freedom as Feminist Resistance

Economic freedom for women is an essential, core form of resistance to patriarchal and capitalist domination. As Armstrong puts it, "the refusal to separate domestic, reproductive, and waged labor has remained central to socialist feminist thought and organizing." (Armstrong 29). This recognition challenges the age-old scheme that assigns women unremunerated household contributions by making their labor invisible and not valuable in economic terms. Control over income, employment, and resource by women breaks those systems that build dependency and gendered exploitation. Because "feminist struggles for 'wages for housework, access to social services, labor rights' are not economic demands but rather acts of political resistance confronting the material basis of women's subordination," (Armstrong 31), therefore an act of asserting some agency that can resist intersecting systems of control through economic empowerment—in paid work, ownership or financial autonomy. Economic freedom is not just a way of gaining individual liberty but a means of collective action for breaking down persistent inequalities.

Armstrong retells efforts in history by socialist feminist movements that connected women's economic function to larger structures of domination—particularly

racism, colonialism, and imperialism. These feminists refused to accept an explanation that located the oppression of women solely in the dynamism of gender roles but insisted on relating it to economic exploitation through labor devaluation. Armstrong writes, “Socialist feminists consistently highlighted how capitalism relied on women’s unpaid reproductive labor to sustain both the working class and the economy” (Armstrong 26).

The house is seen as a place of work, not only care, and women’s unpaid labor becomes the way in which labor power is reproduced for capitalism. As articulated by the Wages for Housework campaign, “waged labor and unwaged labor were interdependent”—the economic system relies on keeping a great deal of labor unacknowledged and uncompensated; particularly that of women (Armstrong 28).

Armstrong also stresses the organizing work that brought women across class and racial lines together. Feminist organizations such as the Combahee River Collective and the Third World Women’s Alliance realized that economic liberation of women of color was integral both to destroy racism and to dismantle patriarchy. They challenged white middle-class feminism and the mainstream aspect of Marxism by putting forth the fact that economic justice includes reproductive labor, emotional work, and caregiving roles who are not paid well since they fall in the category of work associated with femininity or Black and brown women- reclaiming their labor and making it political, women turn economic struggle into collective resistance.

3.3 Method of Analysis

The analytical methodology in this study is based on content and thematic analysis. Content analysis accommodates the study in tracking repeated symbols and images related to the theme of patriarchy, gender identity, and women’s empowerment: metaphors of silence, confinement, voice, and freedom (Krippendorff, 2004). On the other hand, thematic analysis discovers key themes that run through the poems; challenges to traditional gender roles, expressions of autonomy, and feminist resistance. This helped bring forth the underlying gender discourses within the text and how these social norms are either maintained or challenged. The study also analysed specific visual devices and themes related to patriarchy, gender identity, and female empowerment for a

better, more holistic understanding of the text regarding the engagement with feminist themes.

The features of writing and literary devices that the analysis thus focused on for the content and thematic interpretation are:

- **Figurative Devices**

Metaphors are one of the figures of speech that writers and poets use to direct the readers or audience to the essential interpretations of words beyond their literal meanings at face value, in the pursuit of digging deep into the soul of their writing. This gives them a chance to express rather complex notions, feelings, and themes in a much more lively and imaginative manner that often appeals to the senses or intellect of the reader. According to M. H. Abrams, metaphors are "the deviation from the standard meaning or word order to achieve a specific meaning or effect" (Abrams 96). In poetry, they are primarily important in expressions of themes such as identity, oppression, resistance, in which they enable the poet to capture the emotional and social struggles of his or her subjects.

- **Imagery**

Imagery is the descriptive language in literature used for the creation of a vivid sensory experience through reading or listening, with the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. It is the most common way to evoke the emotions or make a person feel as though they are part of the whole experience in poetry and prose. According to M. H. Abrams, imagery is defined as “the expression of sensory experience through language” (Abrams 165) and plays a major role in increasing the emotional and sensory depth of literary works. This study has been on the poetry of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz, who imaged through their work the erasure and struggle of Pakistani women fighting against the wash of societal norms. The poets manage to bring out the emotional and psychological impact of patriarchal oppression through a visual and sensorial representation of the experiences of marginalized women, at the same time underlining the resilience of these women. Through these powerful descriptions, the poets focus attention on specific sociocultural contexts in which women’s identities are shaped, challenged, or diminished.

- **Symbolism**

Symbolism refers to the use of an object, character, or event wherein the concrete details are used to stand for abstractions in the world of ideas. This literary device enables a writer or poet to express a fairly complex idea with great intensity because ordinary objects take on extra or extended meanings. As told by William Harmon, he used symbolism to mean “the use of one object to represent or suggest another, hidden object or idea” (Harmon 514). This study undertakes a study of the expressions, imagery, and objects employed by Hashmi and Ijaz as symbols for wider questions of women within patriarchal and postcolonial societies. Many of these symbols are involved in concepts of freedom, resistance, or oppression, presenting a challenge to the poets regarding social constraints placed on women. Underneath the symbolic language, the poets denote the entanglement of women’s lives and convey the totality not of one’s experience but of the emotional and social struggle of hers as she comes to terms with and battles against this restrictive culture in Pakistani culture.

- **Personification**

Personification is the attribution of human qualities to non-human things, such as objects, animals, or abstract ideas. This device is applied to draw out abstract or lifeless features and make them more relatable and evocative for readers. M. H. Abrams opines, "it gives human characteristics to abstract ideas, animals, or inanimate objects” (Abrams 201). Personification, is one of the most dramatic figures available for the utmost promulgation of ideas, is utilized by Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz in their poetry to represent concepts so intangible and complex as patriarchy, oppression, and hope. By making these abstractions concrete through personification, the active nature of abstract forces is given nearness and tangibility, sensitively revealing their significant impact on the lives of women. The use of this stylistic device assists in bettering the reader's understanding regarding the manner in which systems of oppression work—it works as not only something far away and hypothetical but as a determinant of how the lives and selves of individual Pakistani women are shaped.

- **Simile**

This is a rhetorical device wherein certain words such as "like" or "as" are used to make a comparison between two different things, through which a poet can bring certain apparent dissimilar things into better focus by stressing their likenesses. According to William Harmon, a simile is defined as "a comparison, usually introduced with the words 'like' or 'as,' that compares one thing to another in order to clarify or improve the image" (Harmon 479). In this study, the allegory is crucial in exploring the complex emotions and identities of women portrayed in the poetry of Hashmi and Ijaz. Through the use of allegory, the poet effectively portrays the resilience, strength, and fragility of women in the face of societal pressures. This literary device deepens the emotional resonance of the poem and makes abstract experiences, such as the restrictions placed on women in Pakistani society, more vivid and understandable. Comparison creates relatable images that help bridge the gap between the reader understanding and the poet's message, enhancing the poem's emotional depth and thematic impact.

- **Metaphor**

A metaphor is a figure of speech that, unlike a simile, makes a direct comparison between two unrelated things without using the words "like" or "as." By equating one thing with another, a metaphor creates a more implicit comparison that adds depth and meaning to a text. According to M. H. Abrams, "a metaphor equates one thing with another, thereby transferring some of the properties of the second thing to the first" (Abrams 97). In this analysis, metaphor is a powerful tool to convey the intersecting oppressions faced by women in Pakistan in the poetry of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz. Metaphor allows the poets to express in a nutshell very complex themes such as the oppression of women, social constraints, and the quest for independence. Metaphor boldly expresses the emotional and psychological weight on women as they strive within constraining social norms; it helps the reader to better comprehend the oppression and resistance of women within Pakistani society. Deeply meaningful, this device adds more strata to the meaning, enabling the poet to talk about things on higher levels of abstraction but, at the same time, with much greater psychic effect on the reader.

In summary, figurative devices such as imagery, symbolism, personification, similes, and metaphors are such important tools in the poetry of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz. These tools allow poets to convey complex themes of gender inequality, intersectional oppression, and the struggle for agency and autonomy in a deeper and more powerful way. These tools allow the poets to convey complex themes of gender inequality, intersectional oppression, and a struggle for agency and autonomy using a very deep and powerful mode. By using these literary techniques, the poets bring to life the emotional and psychological experience of women living in such restrictive social environments. The use of these devices does not only make their expression richer but also deepens the reader's understanding of the complex oppression of women in patriarchal and post-colonial societies. Hashmi and Ijaz forcefully deploy figurative language to challenge social norms and give voice to silenced Pakistani women as they bring out the latent subjective dynamics seeking to resist and redefine their identities.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the analysis will be made of selected poems by Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz in terms of how they reflect the challenges, resistance, and empowerment concerning women in Pakistani society. The paper shows how language, imagery, and symbolism are employed by the poets to critique patriarchal norms and untangle themes such as identity, autonomy, and social expectations. It will also show how the poems under discussion here give expression to women at the periphery, bring out emotional kindred struggles, and negotiate the terms of their agency within rather stifling socio-cultural arrangements.

4.1 Selected Poems of Seher Hashmi

Seher Hashmi is a contemporary Pakistani poet. She writes about identity, gender, the demands of society, and the lives of women against a background of patriarchy. Through her poetry, she reflects on the struggle of voiceless women and the rules of the system that forms and fashions their lives and roles in Pakistani culture. Her writing is more concerned with race, class, and gender confluences; it gives a platform for voices that are usually silenced or ignored. Her poetry is a challenge to the system, demanding change and more active recognition of women's agency.

In the poetry book *Othered* by Hashmi, a peripheral woman's experience forms the central axis around which some very sensitively written poems challenge and celebrate the different dimensions of female gender roles-creating powerful images with a rich language-as they articulate a discourse of women's survival strategies within structures of patriarchal power that significantly dictate cultural and social norms. The poems in this collection assert a critical perspective on what it means to be female within the labyrinthine complexities of Pakistani social and cultural life.

For this study, I have chosen the following poems over others: “After all those years,” “Finally I Got a BMW,” “Spill me free Falling,” “Here I Am,” “I Exist,” and “Woman without Man are.” These poems in particular touch on important themes concerning gender roles, identity, social norms, and women’s empowerment. They show

Hashmi's ability to critique patriarchy in Pakistani society yet bring out the power and agency of women under seemingly oppressive conditions. Each of the poems provides insight into the experience of women and the larger social and cultural pressures facing them in Pakistani society.

4.1.1 After All Those Years

This analysis approaches Seher Hashmi's poem "After All Those Years" through the interpretive paradigm and a feminist theoretical lens. The aim is to critically explore how gendered language, symbolic imagery, and thematic constructs are used to express agency, resistance, and the redefinition of feminine identity. Drawing upon the works of bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Elisabeth Armstrong, this reading seeks to uncover how the poem constructs the identity of the audacious woman in the socio-cultural context of Pakistani society.

In this study, the term 'audacious women' will mean those who, in spite of speaking and exercising their agency within deeply entrenched structures of gendered oppression, do not accept the constraints of patriarchal normative limits. These women do not just survive systemic silencing; they break the roles given to them. Audacity is not just defiance here; it is the reclamation of subjectivity and autonomy in a critical manner.

The poem opens with the lines "I spent balancing / On tippy toes," right from the start acquainting the reader with the unstable emotional and physical work done by the speaker. Such a balancing act is what has to be considered for negotiating societal expectations and gendered duties, a theme that continues through the illustration of domestic chores—"I folded, unfolded / Ironed, hung ready / In vain." These words speak of invisible labor and emotional investment expected of women, particularly in South Asian cultures, where love would commonly be equated with sacrifice. As Mohanty (2003) notes, female labor within the household is often depoliticized and taken as a cultural obligation rather than as a site where power relations and ideologies could be reinforced.

The lines "After all those fears / I caked up underneath / Pretty pink pouts" show us that emotional suppression is performed in a gendered way. The metaphor of "caking" fears underneath aestheticized femininity speaks to the pressure on women to stay

composed and pretty while hiding their inner struggles. This is in line with bell hooks' notion that "being oppressed means the absence of choices" for here the speaker has to hide her vulnerability under a socially acceptable mask. In this, the poem subtly criticizes how silencing, both emotionally and mentally, is perpetuated through seemingly harmless beauty standards.

In the final lines, "At last, you show / When it's too late / I have already set sail alone / Because Odysseus doesn't have / To be male anymore," the speaker asserts narrative and existential independence. The belated presence of the male figure is made moot because the speaker has already undertaken her own journey. The calling of Odysseus, a usual figure of brave manliness, is changed to state that great journeys and choices are not just for men. This resonates with Mohanty's saying that women, mostly in postcolonial places, can define themselves and resist even while dealing with male power (Mohanty, 1984). The one who speaks does not just leave behind needing others; she takes back old forms of power and changes stories about culture.

The poem exemplifies what voice and agency mean to hooks. Setting sail alone is a metaphor for self-sufficiency, an ultimate speech act. As finally stated by hooks in 1989, "For the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited... moving from silence into speech is a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. Thus, the speaker's journey is a process of healing and putting back together, in which she denies the roles given to her and takes back authorship of her own story. At the same time, it deeply relates the speaker's journey with the real living conditions of Pakistani women. The household responsibilities, emotional restraint, and male dependence are directly challenged by the language and tone of the poem. It is here that Mohanty's notion of contextually situated women's experiences comes into play: rather than presenting a monolithic or universal woman, this poem places its speaker within particular socio-cultural restraints and allows for her emergence as a resisting subject.

In this poem the domestic chores and emotional restraint of the speaker reflect what Armstrong has described as a "refusal to separate domestic, reproductive, and waged labor" which socialist feminists locate as central in the politics of resistance (Armstrong 29). This poem makes a challenge against the obscured visibility of women's

labor, reflecting Armstrong's observation that "the material basis of women's subordination" is challenged by "feminist struggles for wages for housework, access to social services, and labor rights" (Armstrong 31). The single act of sailing by the speaker may be read as a signifier of both emotional liberation and economic defiance.

To conclude, the poem "After All Those Years" narrates boldly the tale of a audacious woman who rose above conventional femininity and claimed her right to make decisions for herself through candid emotions and literal leaving. This analysis, based on the interpretive paradigm and feminist critical discourse theory, shows how Hashmi's poetic language critiques patriarchal norms and present alternate identities for women in Pakistani society. With theoretical lenses from bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty and Armstrong, the speaker appears as both a product and a critic of her cultural context.

4.1.2 Finally I Got a BMW

In "Finally I Got a BMW", Seher Hashmi offers a sharp and humorous comment on the social values relating to class, gender, respectability, and showy femininity in cities of Pakistan. Looking at it through a feminist view and using the ideas of bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Armstrong, we can see how male-ruled and class-based systems decide women's public image and acceptability. The speaker's change from being on the sidelines to seeming empowerment—caused not by inner change but by getting a fancy car—gives a sharp comment on the terms of women's power and the acting out of status.

The main focus of the poem captures the image of audacious woman, as described here: a female who opposes narratives of invisibility, shame, and lower status by showing strength, using irony, and taking back her identity. Her voice comes out from small spaces between people's criticism and labels; she laughs at the very situations that made her unreadable by society. The first line "Suddenly I started existing" plainly shows the change in social worth given to the narrator once she got a BMW. Her visibility does not stem from her human attributes but from the capitalist trophy of success, the car. As Mohanty (2003) argues, women's lives in postcolonial societies are typically overdetermined by external markers of value, class, respectability, etc., leaving very little room for authentic self-definition.

This narrative of satire is shot through with what bell hooks would call the politics of appearance, in which femininity serves as a locus both for control and resistance. “Wave back my hair biting left corner lower lip / While tinting my pout in back view” illustrates the expectation placed on women to perform an artful, composed, and sexualized version of desirable femininity—only once they are deemed worthy by society. It superficially empowers women; the speaker mocks this empowerment and reveals how women are still objectified even as they appear to “belong” in elite spaces. For hooks, “the struggle to gain voice is the struggle to define one’s identity in a culture that silences” (hooks, *Talking Back* 1989). Here, ironically revealing the terms upon which voice is socially acceptable, the speaker reclaims voice through irony and parody. The lines “Certificate of humanity by my side / Its shimmery body / Waves privilege, a token of existence” put forward the very fact of women’s legitimacy being so immensely commercialized. The poem places the BMW as a metonym for status, self-esteem, and social mobility—class and gender ideologies are very deeply planted in the definition of what comprises a woman’s social capital. This is how Mohanty (1984) would have criticized homogenized Western feminist constructions of Third World women as mere victims. Thus, the speaker manifests an agency contextualized—a calculated performance and irony that allows her to navigate systems of stigma and shame. Her former life—crazy mother, divorcee Lumina, a stigma—contrasted with the post-BMW transformation would starkly illustrate what Mohanty (2003) refers to as triple marginalization: the compounding effects of gender, class, and marital status on a woman’s place in society. She describes herself as having been perceived “a blatant crime against vanity,” “the odd one out.” Respectability politics has a powerful gaze; it punishes any deviation from patriarchal norms. Her past self will be constructed as deviant and disposable; her present self, with added markers of class, becomes palatable.

The criticism of reliance on "filthy rich old men" and "Richard Gere's crutches" ironically points to the cultural patterns of how to make it for women who don't have social capital. These lines do little more than make fun of the ‘sugar daddy’ cliché; they comment more incisively on the societal imperative by which women are expected to tie their identities to male wealth and status. The daring woman in this poem does not become submissive, grateful for the fact that she has been noticed; she is acutely aware of

the sharp contradictions in the ways agency is granted or withheld based on patriarchal, capitalist norms.

Through hooks' concepts of voice and agency, along with Mohanty's theory of contextualized women's experiences, the speaker in "Finally I Got a BMW" is not simply celebrating liberation. Rather, she is critiquing those very structures that define liberation in materialistic and patriarchal terms. Irony, the awareness of how one is "allowed" to exist presently, signifies a conscious challenge to those very systems that earlier aimed at erasing her. This is indeed an audacious act not merely in acquiring the car but in unveiling and subverting the rules of social worth.

Furthermore, the poet's ironic social change after purchasing a BMW exemplifies Armstrong's criticism of capitalist structures that use economic symbols to determine women's worth. According to Armstrong, capitalism "relied on women's unpaid reproductive labor to sustain both the working class and the economy," but it only gives women credit when they follow consumerist standards (Armstrong 26). Now prominent because of her wealth, the speaker exposes the interdependence of "waged labor and unwaged labor" (Armstrong 28), ridiculing the hypocrisy of marginalizing women until they are economically useful or stylized.

In this study, this poem acts as a strong feminist criticism that uncovers the complex interactions of gender, class, respectability, and voice. It shows very clearly how personal is political and how daily experiences mainly those of marginalized women in a South Asian city setting can turn into places of resistance and redefinition. Hashmi's speaker is bold not because she has become acceptable but because she uses her acceptance to reveal the very structure that once treated her as less than human.

4.1.3 Spill Me Free Falling

In "Spill Me Free Falling", Seher Hashmi presents a poetic articulation of voice, silence, and identity in very abstract, fluid metaphors relating to the psychic constraints that women internalize in their struggles with the demands of silence imposed by society. This poem shall be read within an interpretive paradigm that allows a subjective, context-driven reading of the speaker's psychological and social realities, which interrogates the relationship between language, power, and gender. The speaker here represents an

audacious woman—not through loud defiance but rather by bravely articulating what seems in articulable: giving poetic form to silence, repression, and emotional fluidity.

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Audacious women as described here is the refusal to be bound by the prescribed notions of silence and passivity. This is not a claim of empowerment through societal validation, nor by the shattering of male-centered myths. It is rather an attempt to break the silence—give form to the ineffable by way of metaphor. Thus, it questions how language can contain or hold such emotional truths: “How do you articulate / what echoes / reverberates / long after it’s gone?” These are silences that cannot be taken for empty, but rather are filled with reverberations and meanings—a point that hooks too underscores when she says “language is also a place of struggle” (Yearning 1990).

This poem can be read through Chandra Mohanty’s idea of women’s experiences as contextualized, especially in postcolonial settings where their voices are fractured by multiple forms of oppression—family expectations, religious rules, class structures, and gender ideologies. The poem’s refusal to be read in a traditional narrative or to present a settled self-reflection, the speaker’s experience as displaced and wound back into what the poem terms “spiral origin.” This is in line with Mohanty’s (2003) reading that women’s identities should be understood as non-linear and historically situated rather than universal or monolithic.

The mental and spiritual drifting is shown in the words “Shadow unexplained / spirit wandering / about in vain.” The images of ghostliness and being unseen connect with the threefold exclusion of women from Pakistani society, particularly those who do not or cannot fit into normal roles of daughter, wife, or mother. Here, the bold woman is

one who demands to live— even in broken, changeable forms—in a community that wants to make her quiet or unnoticeable.

By setting this poem within intersectional feminist theory, we see that the speaker's confusion is not just personal but political. Her fight for expression is not due to personal insufficiency but to social systems that do not have the words for women's innerness. Just as Mohanty notes, the West tends to universalize oppression of women without seeing the particular cultural shape it takes (Mohanty, 1984). This poem resists simplifications it presents a deeply contextualized voice, struggling with spiritual, emotional, and linguistic dimensions of being.

Moreover, Armstrong's broader concept of labor, which encompasses emotional and reproductive tasks that are frequently hidden, is reflected in this poem's rejection of set language forms and quest for emotional articulation. Armstrong's assertion that "economic freedom... enables women to assert agency and resist intersecting systems of control" (Armstrong 31) is echoed by the speaker's struggle to articulate the inexpressible. Her metaphorical voice challenges the logic of capitalism, which disentangles value from intangible labor such as caring for others and surviving emotionally.

In conclusion, "Spill Me Free Falling" presents the figure of the audacious woman not as someone who breaks the silence with clear words but rather as one who insists that non-verbal, emotional, and abstract expressions of identity are valid. Indeed, through theoretical lenses by hook, Mohanty and Armstrong, therefore making the speaker's search for a language that can contain "fluid" into a radical act a challenge to dominant masculine, rigid, and rational discourse feminist poetics finds a space in complexity, contradiction, and resilience.

4.1.4 Here I am

In "Here I Am", Seher Hashmi presents a very thoughtful and strong expression of womanhood, based in both gentleness and strength. The speaker comes forth after a symbolic removal of her social, physical, and mental covers shedding layers of roles and stories given to her to make a simple yet sincere statement of being alive. This poem

serves as a verbal revolt against patriarchal as well as postcolonial powers that control how women in Pakistan express themselves and define who they are.

The audacious woman, who refuses, in the face of systemic erasure and dehumanization, to disown her flaws, who demands to be recognized as fully human—right to be seen. “After being stripped off / Layers and layers of skin” (ln. 1–2) marks the beginning of an unflinching unveiling, which resonates with what bell hooks describes as voice having agency, where speaking one’s truth is indeed a political and feminist act. “When we speak as liberator subjects, we recover ourselves and each other”. (Talking Back 1989). The speaker’s voice is exactly that: an attempt to reclaim subjectivity from within a discourse that constantly erases it.

The poem also resonates with Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s critique of contextualized image of the “Third World woman” as passive, oppressed, and voiceless. Mohanty emphasizes the need to contextualize women’s experiences within specific histories, cultures, and power structures (hooks 56). Here Hashmi critiques such discursive flattening. The speaker ironically denies “Big Daddies / Group of industries / Policies, sans narratives / Not even cannon of my muslimanity” (ln. 13-16) and instead describes herself as a woman carrying the precarious load of “shame, honor, dignity” (ln 18), these are gendered constructs that have traditionally been imposed on South Asian women. It aligns with Mohanty’s argument that women's identities are often constructed by the discourses of cultural honor and religious purity, through which patriarchal control is maintained.

The concept of intersectionality, elaborated more by bell hooks, is central to this poem’s analysis. The speaker foregrounds her “shitty brown skin / Fungi passport / Frail feminine feet” (ln. 26–28) as markers of racial, national, and gendered marginalization, insisting that even these overlapping disadvantages do not erase her right to basic humanity. This line of thought is what also brings forth hooks’ argument that “to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (Yearning, 1990). The poem asserts presence despite marginalization both within the nation and within the global racialized order making a feminist demand for dignity, not through

exceptionalism, but through ordinary, universal humanity: “Just me / Very flawed, loopholed me / Like every other human” (ln. 21–23).

The last stanzas are very strong in showing the heart of this bold identity: not asking for what is rightfully hers, but clearly realizing she was being left out by the system. Lines like “Comes to others for free / Like basic neutrals / Found in everyone’s cupboard / Missing in mine” (ln. 33–36) show how dignity is not fairly shared and they ask a world that denies the most basic human rights, respect, value, place to women like her. In asking “just few chunks / Even leftovers will do / Half eaten pies” (ln. 38–40), the speaker critiques the classed and gendered economy of value, where privilege, rights, and recognition are luxuries rather than being guaranteed.

By bringing together hooks’ ideas of voice and intersectionality with Mohanty’s criticism of postcolonial gender ideas, the poem becomes a strong place for looking at feminism. It does not lean on abstract empowerment or Western feminist stories of self-reliance but gives a real, felt, and very specific telling of female strength and power in Pakistan. The speaker’s “claim” (ln. 25) is not for being better than others or even equality by modern terms but for small pieces of humanity poetic criticism of all systems that say they are democratic or fair but do not serve women like her.

“No big daddies / No group of industries” (ln. 13-14) is the speaker’s sarcastic rejection of institutional power, which directly challenges the economic and patriarchal hierarchies that determine women’s value. Armstrong argues, “Women challenge the systems that perpetuate gendered exploitation and dependency by taking charge of their income, jobs, and resources” (Armstrong 29). Since Armstrong highlights that these are structural critiques rather than merely personal struggles, the poet’s refusal to plead for dignity here is consistent with feminist opposition to the economic foundation of subordination (Armstrong 31).

In “Here I Am”, the audacious woman does not come across as a superhero or an icon. She comes across as a woman stripped of all illusions, confronting the world with only her voice, her imperfect self, and an unrelenting will to be seen. Seher Hashmi through a powerful interplay of poetic language and feminist theory composes a

testimony of survival that reclaims dignity, agency, and defiance in the South Asian feminist context.

4.1.5 I Exist

In “I Exist”, Seher Hashmi initiates an evocative process of reclamation through poetic discourse by asserting the presence of females whose identities are erased by the socio-political and cultural silencing. The speaker’s reiterative declaration, “I exist,” works as well—a refrain of resistance, a mighty assertion of presence from the margins. Such speaking aligns with bell hooks’ valuing voice as agency, where speaking from the margin disrupts dominant narratives and reaffirms subjectivity: “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited... a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible” (*Talking Back*, 1989).

The poem thematically and structurally traces the numerous sites of social, spatial, racial, and gendered exclusion where the speaker is made to live, “beneath / Layers and layers / Of shame, its blame” (ln. 1–3)—in other words, the internalized burden of patriarchal and moralistic discourses. This resonates with Mohanty’s critique of how women in postcolonial societies bear the double burden of imposed expectations for honor, modesty, and allegiance to the nation. As she argues, these “cultural narratives” obscure real experiences of women by imposing on them a static, tradition-bound subject position (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*).

The identity of the speaker is broken, concealed, and constantly moved: “Out of sight... / Behind layers and layers / Of what I must be” (ln. 6–9). This brings up Mohanty’s idea of contextualized experience, where the real lives of women cannot be seen apart from their socio-historical and cultural settings. Here, Hashmi’s speaker fights against being seen as just one uniform subject by showing the hidden work of survival under society’s demands.

The metaphor “voodoo doll” again used at line 34, “gagging for life” at line 33, and “white dwarf star / Core exhausted” at lines 72 to 73, in their repetition lends an eerie geography of marginality, physical, psychological, and spiritual. The images of bodily fragmentation and cosmic isolation lend expression to the intersections of gendered, racialized, and class-based oppression; it aligns with hooks' concept of intersectionality in

that: “Being oppressed means the absence of choices. Intersectionality is about the ways multiple forms of discrimination intersect and compound”. (hooks *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*).

The speaker’s voice does not emerge from a place of entitlement, but rather from the periphery of existence — far away from “Porsche’s drive / Off villas sublime / Parties, drinks, pleasantries” (ln. 39–41). These lines critique class privilege and urban elitism which too often exclude women who do not identify with dominant, glamorous, bourgeois femininities. Here the audacious woman is not defined by her visibility or power in the public domain but by her refusal to disappear even when pushed to the “outskirts / Of humanity” (ln 45–46). This resonates with Mohanty's idea of double/triple marginalization where women were marginalized not only on gender but also on class, race, and colonial hierarchies.

Existence turns radically throughout the poem. To “exist” in Hashmi’s lexicon is to resist effacement, to survive systems of social, religious, and patriarchal violence that seek to silence, gag, and discipline women. Even as “a letter remains silent / Of a misspelled word” (ln 54–55) the speaker remains insistent of her humanity. The invocation of metaphysical spaces: “Some universe out in space” (ln 11), “Some constellation, hung unaware” (ln 67) serves to contrast the speaker’s radical isolation with an expansive, limitless claim to identity.

This poem thereby offers a lyrical expression of brave womanhood as the recovery of voice, body, space, and soul in a setting of systemic denial. Audacious women are not simply bold or defiant they are women who through language, art, and consciousness fight against and survive structures built to obliterate them. In Pakistani society where women are appraised by stringent and traditional measures of chastity, notions of class respectability, and patriotism toward the nation; the feminist speaker in “I Exist” provides a strong counter-narrative: I am visible; see me in my most abject and unglamorous form.

The continuous declaration “I Exist” opposes societal erasure connected to class and gendered invisibility. Armstrong’s claim that “capitalism relied on women’s unpaid reproductive labor” while making them invisible outside of patriarchal structures is

reflected in the speaker's marginality—"Outskirts of humanity" (Armstrong 26). By transforming invisibility into resistance, her survival, voice, and existence embody what Armstrong refers to as a "collective strategy to dismantle entrenched inequalities" (Armstrong 31).

The words "I Exist" stand as much a text against prevailing femininity discourses. One perceives the reiteration of "I exist" not as redundancy but rather as an act of linguistic resistance, reclaiming subjectivity from spatial-temporal formations of discourse that have long enforced silence. As hooks notes "To be truly visionary, we must root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (hooks 157). Hashmi's speaker imagines and embodies those possibilities.

4.1.6 Women Without Men Are

In "Women Without Men Are," Seher Hashmi writes a very plain and disturbing picture of how women's independence, particularly when it is separate from male control like marriage, is looked down upon and blamed in people's minds. The poem gives a clear look at culture regarding how audacious women those who act outside usual female roles are gradually wiped out of memory, treated as criminals, or made fun of through ugly and disrespectful images. This concept corresponds with the theory of double and triple marginalization by Chandra Talpade Mohantye; where, women are not only gender-marginalized but also intersecting marginalized by sexuality, class, and morality (Mohanty Feminism Without Borders).

The title of the poem, "Women Without Men Are" talks a subversion of patriarchal logic which equated a woman's social worth with her relational status to men. It presents the women as scribbled on / Public toilet walls, thereby indicating how public discourse debases autonomous female identities into mere obscenities that effectively silence and erase them through ridicule. This textual graffiti, therefore, becomes an emblem of social marginalization as it reflects what bell hooks perceived: "Those who transgress against the normative behavior of women are not simply ignored; they are actively vilified. Patriarchy has no use for the non-conforming woman; she must be made invisible or monstrous" (hooks Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center).

The women in the poem do not come to have space outside of dominant narrative, they are vilified in secret, shameful ways. They become “obnoxious improv on erotic puns / Foul disarray of graphic fall” (ln. 4–5), means that their very being is located within disgust and taboo-discourses. Toilet graffiti provides quite grotesque imagery to informally yet powerfully represent societal scripts directed at women who step outside the prescribed role widows, divorcees, single women, or openly sexual women. Mohanty notes that such females are marked as deviant not because of some intrinsic moral deficiency but due to their breach of collective social codes on purity and domesticity.

The speaker again attacks the double standards of public morality, saying people “pretend not reading even / If comprehended” (ln. 11–12). Related by bell hook, to silenced voices and moral duplicity of patriarchal societies where a woman’s transgression is at the same time consumed and condemned: “It permits men to sexually objectify women and holds them responsible for the consequences of that objectification” (Outlaw Culture, 1994, p. 20). Hashmi shows how society both fetishizes and shames the notion of women without men thereby reinforcing misogyny under the guise of cultural morality.

In this study, the audacious woman is someone who dares to break the prescribed roles of domesticity and sexuality. Rather than being celebrated, she is pushed at the periphery of social awareness, where her identity becomes “Smudged toilet graffiti / Ashen lines, gothic arcs / Outlined in utter frustration” (ln. 17–19). The language of poetry captures how both structural and symbolic violence erodes women’s subjectivity, what survives are just little pieces on “pale urine walls” (ln 21), bringing to mind both actual dirt and figurative impurity.

The graffiti serves as an artifact of discourse through which we may come to articulate how language, in all its crudity, secrecy, and publicity at once, works to reestablish gender hierarchies. The writing on toilets is symbolic sanitary and secret spaces in a metaphor for the dirty, unmentionable status of women who decide to separate themselves from the safety of the patriarchy. These women become graffiti; rather than authors of language, they become its defiled subjects. They do not get a voice

or agency because they have transgressed articulate bounds of respectability, propriety, and visibility.

Hashmi's poem turns out to be the radical assertion of feminist critique in the Pakistani society, where women's public visibility is often subjected to policing and moralizing. It shows how systems do not just negate brazen women; they act to symbolic silence and obliteration of their agency—narratives of nameless scorn upon them. The women are not absent; rather, perceived as monstrous—shamefully hyper visible yet humbly invisible.

This poem advances your thesis in a critical way by showing how poetic discourse turns out to be a feminist act of excavation that is, the unearthing of women's voices buried beneath linguistic, cultural, and ideological systems of suppression. As bell hooks observes, "It is only when women begin to resist male domination that the vision of a liberator future emerges" (hooks Talking Back). Hashmi resists in "Women Without Men Are" by writing these women back into poetic consciousness not as victims, but as warnings to systems that once defaced them.

This poem exemplifies the dehumanization of women who are not economically connected to patriarchy. According to Armstrong, socialist feminists "rejected the idea that women's oppression was only about gender roles," highlighting the connection between it and "economic exploitation and labor devaluation" (Armstrong 26). Because capitalism, as Armstrong points out, needs "to keep some labor invisible and unpaid—particularly women's" (Armstrong 28), the lack of economic protection for men results in vilification. This poem reveals how women who defy patriarchal economy face criminalization rather than liberation.

Conclusion

Seher Hashmi's poetry as a whole provides a deep reading of social norms and expectations of women's autonomy, identity, and emotional battle, through a patriarchal order. Every poem, one after the other, is a detailed account of how women in Pakistan are oppressed, sidelined, and sometimes resilient, portrayed through stark metaphors, vivid imagery, and raw language. Her scrutiny of themes like emotional repression, materialism, autonomy, and social hypocrisy speaks for the rather intricate odds against

women in asserting their individuality. Be it visibility through material status or the attempt to resist social judgment, her poetry is an addition to the long fight of a person to be recognized and express oneself. Hashmi's writing not only points out the oppression that includes and restricts but also unwinds its defiance and resilience as it eventually marries the wider feminist story of empowerment, autonomy, and audacious identity retrieval from a retentive social landscape.

4.2 Selected Poems of Fatima Ijaz

Fatima Ijaz is a poet of Pakistan writing today. Her poetry book, *The Shade of Longing and Other Poems,* focuses on the emotional, social, and psychological dilemmas challenging people, specifically females within Pakistani societal constraints. Poems like "The Shade of Longing and Other Poems", "The Rejected Girl", "Obscurity", and "Princess of Sorrow" bring out the challenges that rigid gender roles, cultural expectations, and societal pressure pose. She uses powerful imagery, metaphors, and symbols to critique women's oppression and exclusion against conflicting desires of personal yearning and societal expectation. It depicts her work as one that reflects the sturdy nature of individuals fighting to recover their identity, autonomy, and dignity in a society that limits self-expression.

4.2.1 The Shade of Longing

In "The Shade of Longing," Fatima Ijaz introspectively and meditatively presents identity, memory, and the inner self with many symbols, where the audacious woman emerges not through defiance of outer norms but through internal reclamation of voice and subjectivity. Whereas Hashmi's poems show overt rebellion, her poet turns out to be in a psychic space of longing, turning the poetic act into a quiet form of resistance. The audacious woman here is one who dares to find her interiority articulate it; reflect on it question it self-authoring narrative in a culture that denies women that right.

The opening lines compare the speaker to "brick-a-brac sold at a potter's wheel" and "the open-wound of the concert / saying good-bye" (ln. 2–4), evoking imagery of disposability and ephemerality. This tone of fragmentation echoes bell hooks' notion of women being treated as ornamental or secondary within patriarchal narratives: "Sexist thinking has taught us that to be female is to be valueless" (*Feminist Theory: From*

Margin to Center). However, by turning this dispossession into metaphor, the speaker begins to exert agency over her marginalization transforming loss into layered poetic introspection.

Ijaz complicates the linear logic of narrative and belonging by asking, “Do you think we become in the end /characters of our own stories?” (ln. 17–18). This question is deeply aligned with bell hooks’ emphasis on voice as the site of liberation: “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed the revolutionary act that confirms our existence” (hooks 69). The voice of the speaker, questioning, audacious intellectually and tenderly, finds itself in that space between self-invention and cultural constraint where the very process of poetry becomes a means of self-inscription and survival.

Ijaz does not place her speaker in direct opposition to patriarchy; rather she tries to retrieve broken bits of subjectivity in terms of metaphor and myth. “a lotus in a pond” / “hands longer than elliptical staircases leading to the nuns’ quarters” (ln. 13–15) suggests an imaginative revaluation of feminine power outside linear temporality or institutional religion. This speaks to an identity that refuses to be boxed into traditional scripts of Pakistani womanhood. Thus, she probes an interiority that is diffuse, shifting — a refusal to be totalized or simplified.

Chandra Mohanty argues that “Third World woman” gets homogenized as a static victim. Mohanty said for the recognition of contextualized experiences, where agency manifests itself in many modes, not necessarily through overt rebellion (*Feminism Without Borders*). In this sense, Ijaz’s speaker may not be verbal in an activist way; however, her dedication to self-exploration as poetic practice becomes a mode of resistance against structural invisibility.

The metaphor “writing is a petty form of the art of living... / It is not where the sun shines and lives” (ln 21–24) places writing in dark, secret places—like how Pakistani women often express their identities from the edges of both public conversation and literary histories. It is exactly in these low spaces that the speaker comes forth “frightfully whole, like a tree’s shadow” (ln 26). This line expresses a complete but uncontainable female self-rooted, reaching, and self-defined. It is a picture of the audacious woman

who, though formed by societal limits, finds the courage to claim her inner life and complexity.

By situating subjectivity within poetic metaphor and existential questioning, Ijaz challenges the reader to view the interior space as a battleground of gendered existence. In bell hooks' terms, this is an enactment of "oppositional gaze" (hooks 115) where women resist prescribed identities by forming alternative epistemologies of the self -ones that are introspective, imaginative, and subversively personal.

Moreover, beyond apparent labor, Ijaz's poetry explores feminine identity and contemplation. The speaker's inner life, which is frequently written off as unproductive, is reflected in Armstrong's concept that "the home becomes a site of labor, not just care" (Armstrong 26). Her poetic use of metaphor and memory turns into a feminist act that supports Armstrong's theory that all labor, including psychological and emotional labor, should be politicized in opposition to patriarchal capitalism (Armstrong31).

This poem powerfully contributes to the study, audaciousness is not always a roar— it is also a whisper that persists, a thought that refuses to dissolve, self that insists on coherence amid fragmentation. Through Ijaz's lyrical poetics female voice survives the cultural mechanisms which are attempting to contain or erase it. It embodies both the solitude and the solidarity of women who exist on their own terms.

4.2.2 The Rejected Girl

In the poem, "The Rejected Girl" as a haunting portrayal of a socially and psychologically marginalized woman who embodied the audacious woman, rejected, isolated, but surviving defiantly within oppressive structures. The poem's pictures of "soft evening" and "wolves in the woods" (ln 1 3) set a feeling of fragility shaded by threat, which resonates with Chandra Mohanty's criticism of the widespread social and cultural pressures that twice or thrice put women at the edge, mostly in postcolonial places like Pakistan.

The girl's falling "into the night" means both the way society forgets her and how she turns inside herself, which is what boldness might require when open defiance is risky. In Mohanty's words, this shows the related experiences of women whose

opposition might be quiet or symbolic rather than loud and direct. The narrator's counting "stars that kept up the trace" (ln 4) shows a delicate hold on hope or direction in darkness a symbol for the limited places where oppressed women find strength. "Pressed lilacs in forbidden books" (ln 6) captures, in all beauty and containment, the image of how women's identities are often preserved in sanctioned, yet confining, cultural forms like preserved objects rather than fully living subjects. It resonates with bell hooks' insight into the manner patriarchy renders women as objects or symbols rather than subjects of full agency: "To be oppressed means to be deprived of one's voice" (hooks Talking Back) The girl in the poem opens to "page 52" and "the tower trembled" (ln 7), indicating a budding rupture within the very structures that confine her.

The mention of 'ghosts, spiders and crabs' as threatening creatures opening their mouths can be understood as metaphors for various oppression forces, tradition, patriarchy, cultural stigma aiming to silence or devour the bold woman. The unclear last line 'It couldn't be wrong it couldn't be right' brings to mind that in-between condition of those women who are caught between opposite cultural pressures and a personal wish for self-definition.

In this poem, the audacious woman is not shown as victorious in the usual way but more like someone who fights against being forgotten by living on the edges, facing hopelessness, and holding onto a fragile yet determined sense of self. This relates with Mohanty's demand to acknowledge the depth of women's real-life experiences and the types of actions that might not align with standard Western feminist models.

hooks' concept of voice and agency is applied to understand the poem's subtext. The girl inside "dungeons of despair" and "forbidden books" highlights the battle for narrative control and acknowledgement in spaces where female voices are typically silenced. In itself, the poem performs an act of voicing those who have been denied or side proof of hooks' claim that "To speak is to be in a position of power" (hooks *Talking Back*).

Furthermore, the solitude of a woman rejected by social standards that correlate value with financial and marital status is depicted in this poetry. Elizabeth Armstrong says that "Economic freedom is not only a path to personal independence but also a

collective strategy to dismantle entrenched inequalities," (Armstrong 31). In a system that would otherwise try to erase her, the girl's reading, introspection, and symbolic awakening from despair become acts of labor and resistance that restore her visibility and worth.

Analyzing "The Rejected Girl" through these feminist theoretical lenses, the poem comes out as a detailed investigation of the daring woman in Pakistani society—whose bravery is expressed in survival, endurance, and the quiet yet strong claim to selfhood. Fatima Ijaz has highlighted the inner, usually neglected aspects of women's struggle and how they come to form their identities.

4.2.3 Obscurity

The poem "Obscurity" by Fatima Ijaz can be interpreted as a postcolonial feminist account of a woman reclaiming her identity and voice. The poem's journey, which begins in silence and darkness and ends in recall and return, fundamentally illustrates how race, gender, class, and history connect.

Fatima Ijaz's poem "Obscurity, it begins with "Something regal emerges out of the blue sun" is the first paradox in." Both bright and strange, the "blue sun" alludes to a disruption of the norm and possibly a break from traditional gender norms. A notion of female empowerment rising from an unfamiliar or excluded area is evoked by the word "regal," connotes sovereignty, dignity, and authority.

Instead of being passive, the poem's speaker is curious and eager about regaining what has been lost—voice, visibility, and possibly even selfhood. The allusion to a "fearless swan" is significant because, although it is a traditional representation of beauty, freedom, and metamorphosis, it is neither delicate in this context. Instead, it is bold and resurrected from "black ashes," resembling the resurrection of a phoenix. hooks writes "The agency of the oppressed is restored when speaking as an act of resistance" (Talking Back).

"Can it be, that I... shall rise?" is a rhetorical and self-affirming inquiry. The speaker is about to rediscover who she is and turn suffering (ashes) into power. hooks' emphasis on moving from the margin to the center is mirrored in this movement, which

states that, “Being on the periphery means being a part of the whole but not part of the main body.” The speaker’s emergence from ashes represents a challenge to the historical invisibility of women’s labor. Armstrong notes that “socialist feminists consistently highlighted how capitalism relied on women’s unpaid reproductive labor” (Armstrong 26). By declaring herself “fearless” and “regal,” the speaker reclaims dignity and presence, embodying Armstrong’s concept that asserting agency through economic or symbolic means resists systems of gendered exploitation (Armstrong 29).

This poem represents a Pakistani female speaker who has been influenced by cultural, gendered, and possibly linguistic marginalization, according to Mohanty's theory, particularly the concept of contextualized women’s experiences. Mohanty calls for individuality and rejects the universalization of women from the Third World. Ijaz’s poetry here speaks from a distinct socio-cultural matrix in which women's concerns are connected to class, postcolonial identity, language expression, and gender.

As a demand for the restoration of heritage, voice, or even a suppressed cultural identity, the line “Can it be, that the lost, shall return to me?” reflects what Mohanty refers to as the triply marginalized subject—oppressed by patriarchy, colonialism, and global hierarchies (Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders).

In conclusion, “Obscurity” describes how a marginalized woman becomes a self-possessed, regal subject through the use of spare language and striking images. The poem represents the untangling of an ambitious female identity—one that resists cultural silence and finds strength in artistic resistance through its symbolism of ash, resurrection, and questioning.

Thus, Ijaz’s work turns into a feminist reclamation site where agency, memory, and voice are recovered from the ashes of cultural and historical repression. Her boldness is found in survival, introspection, and symbolic rebirth—qualities that are characteristic of hooks' and Mohanty’s feminist philosophy rather than confrontation.

4.2.4 Princess of Sorrow

The poem “Princess of Sorrow” metaphorically describes the complex experiences of audacious women in their struggle to break the boundaries of their own environment, a representation, the castle’s waters enclosing the princess. The image of the princess’ falling in her own castle’s waters (ln. 3) brings out a very strong metaphor of internalized oppression and the struggle against social structures that constrain women within familiar but limiting spaces. It also powerfully reflects Armstrong’s claim that the home “becomes a site of labor” and that women’s unpaid domestic roles are central to their subjugation (Armstrong 26).

The sparrow, with its red, beating heart and arrhythmic pulse (ln 6-7) The sparrow’s flight symbolizes the elusive hope of economic and emotional freedom, and the princess’s entrapment critiques the gendered structures that define worth through dependency—underscoring Armstrong’s call to politicize and reclaim such labor as feminist resistance (Armstrong 31).

This poem can be interpreted with bell hooks’s idea of voice and agency, where audacious women are those who continue to seek freedom despite many obstacles. Hooks argues that “the effort to share one’s experiences is an important step in the process of gaining a sense of self and power” (hooks Talking Back). The princess’s look at the sparrow going off (ln 12-14) shows a time of knowing and agreeing with the space between hope and what is real but also hints at quiet defiance through seeing and remembering.

In Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s concepts, the poem captures the notion of situated women’s experiences; it says that daredevil women face multiple layers of oppression connected to their particular social and cultural contexts. The princess’s fall “in her own castle’s waters” speaks metaphorically the double or even triple marginalization described by Mohanty—where the woman’s contestation is determined by intersecting identities and localized forms of patriarchy. But, also, it is what the sparrow’s flight narrates - hope and resilience possibly beyond these constraints.

The tone and images of the poem make a critical engagement with the real-life experiences of Pakistani women. This poem presents audacious women as those who

negotiate or come to terms with grief and structural impediments while devising or creating hope and agency. The princess's tale thus symbolizes daring womanhood a dynamic between frailty and fortitude, imprisonment and desire for liberation.

Thus, "Princess of Sorrow" enriches the theoretical framework of the study through depicting the layers and contexts of experiences by audacious women. It underlines that audacity is not necessarily always loud or overt in action; it is most of the time quiet, internal, and realized in the tension between despair and hope within restrictive social norms.

4.3 To Sum Up

Fatima Ijaz's poetry delves deeply into themes of identity, freedom, conflict, and social restraints which perfectly reflect the condition of women in Pakistan. For example, poems such as "The Shade of Longing," "Obscurity," "The Rejected Girl," and "Princess of Sorrow" explicitly detail the challenges women face from strict cultural norms, oppressive gender roles to individual aspirations. Through her poems, Ijaz uses bright imagery, metaphors, and symbols to critique how Pakistani societies often mute women and place them in traditional roles. The work bears the burden of emotional resilience and resistance entailed in asserting individuality and reclaiming identity. In the final analysis, her poetry engenders the struggle that women wage for autonomy while voicing the very same struggle that claims identity and freedom in a male-centered society.

The poems by Seher Hashmi in *Othered* and Fatima Ijaz in *The Shade of Longing and Other Poems* pinpoint the complex and oftentimes conflicting dynamics of female identities operating within the confines of Pakistan's sociocultural setting. As emphasized in the review of literature, feminist poetry has emerged "as a major force in Pakistan which challenges socio-cultural norms and calls for women's rights" (Shamsie 112), a call that these poets also embody by revealing oppression and activism in their work. An analysis of their poems in the framework of bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Elisabeth Armstrong helps uncover how Hashmi and Ijaz contribute to feminist literature through giving a voice to bold women, bringing to light oppressions that work at the level of intersectionality, and demand sociocultural reforms.

Intersectionality is a central aspect of bell hooks' theory. It is also fundamental in grappling with the multiple, complex oppressions facing Pakistani women. As brought out by Hashmi and Ijaz, oppression does not exist in isolation but a combination of forces such as race, gender, and class. Both poets use to show how cultural, economic and patriarchal pressures intersect within Pakistani society. Intersectionality is the Interlocking system of power which evident in social constraints that limit women's choices and autonomy. Hashmi and Ijaz's depictions of women struggling with these compounded constraints confirm hooks's insight that "being oppressed means the absence of choices" (hooks 25) and illustrate how intersectionality has shaped their lives.

The literature review highlights how social feminism addresses the "dual oppression of working-class women" (Zinn and Dill 321), which these poets also address by depicting women struggling with economic inequality and sexism. Her poetry recognizes that Pakistani women struggles are not solely based on gender, but are exacerbated by class-based constraints, that aligns with hooks's argument that feminist analysis must take into "totality of oppressive systems to fully understand women's lived experiences" (hooks 72).

Hooks's concepts of voice and agency are particularly relevant to the poetry of Hashmi and Ijaz, as both poets use their work to amplify the voices of women who are often silenced or marginalized in Pakistani society. hooks explains that "Speaking becomes a way to claim our presence in history and to assert our right to exist" (hooks 29), and Hashmi and Ijaz's determination to provide Pakistani women with a platform where they can voice their experiences and challenges reflects this sentiment. By reclaiming this voice, these poets empower women to "challenge dominant narratives" and resist their erasure from societal discourse (Spivak 294).

The literature review of this study mentions that feminist poets such as Fehmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed use poetry to "amplify feminist perspectives and critique patriarchal structures" (Jalil 45). Hashmi and Ijaz continue this tradition by portraying women as agents who confront and challenge the social norms that attempt to constrain them. This aligns with hooks' idea of agency, which she describes as "the power to make transformative decisions about one's life" (hooks 84). By portraying women asserting

their independence and rebelling against societal expectations, Hashmi and Ijaz reflect hooks' belief that "to be truly free, women must claim the power to make decisions about their own lives and resist being controlled by patriarchal systems" (hooks 92).). Her work becomes an agency statement advocating for women's autonomy in the cultural and social context of Pakistan.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concepts of double and triple marginalization are crucial to analyzing how Hashmi and Ijaz capture the specific forms of oppression faced by women in postcolonial societies such as Pakistan. Mohanty argues that "the oppression of Third World women is never simply a matter of gender but involves race, class, and colonial histories" (Mohanty 72), and both poets explore this idea by depicting Pakistani women as bearers of the combined burdens of gender, economic inequality, and cultural expectations. Her work highlights how these "multifaceted struggles" (Ahmad 2014 87) leave Pakistani women doubly or triply marginalized, which aligns with Mohanty's claim that "the identity of third world women is often shaped by the interaction of multiple social forces" (Mohanty 67). This framework complements Mohanty's analysis and provides a broader perspective on how cultural hierarchies reinforce women's marginalization.

The literature review notes that early Pakistani writers such as Ismat Chughtai did groundbreaking work in addressing "gender oppression compounded by social hierarchies" (Menon 132), laying the foundation for poets such as Hashmi and Ijaz. These poets took up Mohanty's challenge to acknowledge the unique experiences of non-Western women, portraying them not only as victims of patriarchy but as individuals struggling with complex oppression and resistance. Mohanty criticizes Western feminism's tendency to generalize women's struggles, and Hashmi and Ijaz echo their views by creating works that reflect the realities of Pakistani women's lives and highlight the specific socioeconomic and cultural challenges they face Furthermore, bell hooks emphasizes the importance of recognizing the "interlocking systems of domination" that oppress women through the simultaneous forces of race, gender, and class (hooks 36). This framework is reflected in the poet's examination of how intersectional oppressions limit women's agency while highlighting their resilience and strategies of resistance.

Mohanty's concept of contextualizing women's experiences is crucial to understanding how Hashmi and Ijaz situate their poetic narratives within the unique socio-cultural landscape of Pakistan. As Mohanty points out, "to assume that all women's struggles are the same is to ignore the specificities that define their experiences" (Mohanty 53). Hashmi and Ijaz challenge this tendency to generalize by rooting their poetry in the context of Pakistan, where gender roles, family responsibilities, and economic pressures shape women's lives in different ways. Their work reflects Mohanty's critique of Western feminism, acknowledging that the oppression of Pakistani women is intertwined with the broader socio-political context of postcolonial Pakistan, where cultural expectations and class-based inequalities limit women's autonomy (Mohanty 64). These negotiations are evident in Hashimi and Ijaz's depictions of women resisting systemic oppression while simultaneously meeting cultural expectations.

The literature review highlighted the work of writers such as Tehmina Durrani, who expose the "the dismal plight of women under feudal tyranny" (Durrani 198) and emphasized the importance of contextualized feminist critique. Hashmi and Ijaz extend this approach, portraying Pakistani women's resistance as not just a rejection of patriarchy, but a nuanced engagement with the familial, cultural, and economic factors that shape their identities. Mohanty's argument that "third world women are not merely passive recipients of patriarchal domination but active agents of their own struggles" (Mohanty 42) is reflected in her portrayal of women in poetry, highlighting the need for an indigenized feminist framework that respects the specificity of Pakistani women's experiences. This is consistent with Spivak's claim that the subaltern "needs to be heard, not just represented" (Spivak 30), highlighting the need to situate Indigenous voices within feminist discourse. Furthermore, bell hooks' concept of "transformative feminism" recognizes the intersection of race, gender, and class as unique factors of oppression, providing a complementary theoretical lens for understanding the complex narratives presented in the works of Hashemi and Ijaz (hooks 57). Together, these frameworks highlight the importance of contextualized, multidimensional analyses of women's struggles and agency in postcolonial societies.

In the context of Pakistani feminist literature, Hashmi and Ijaz's poetry emerges as a powerful medium for challenging oppressive norms and advocating for social

change. The literature review highlights that feminist poetry in Pakistan "embodies the challenges, resilience, and empowerment that women experience within a patriarchal context" (Shamsie 112). Hashmi and Ijaz's work embody this, using poetry to express women's agency, resilience, and desire for autonomy. Her approach aligns with bell hooks' belief that "feminism is a movement to end all forms of exploitation and oppression" (hooks 6), addressing the intersection of gender, class, and societal expectations while working toward a more just society. This multidimensional critique reflects hooks' focus on changing systems of oppression by empowering marginalized voices.

The poets' focus on the local experiences of Pakistani women reflects Chandra Talpade Mohanty's assertion that "feminist scholarship must consider the ways in which class, race, and gender intersect and shape women's lives in postcolonial contexts" (Mohanty 64). By portraying women as active agents in struggle, Hashmi and Ijaz promote a form of feminist solidarity that recognizes the unique experiences of marginalized women in Pakistan and moves beyond the global assumptions of Western feminism. This practice reflects Spivak's insistence on the need to listen to subordinates rather than speak for them, stressing that "subordinates must be allowed to speak on their own terms" (Spivak 30). Hashmi and Ijaz's poetry encourage readers to reflect on the specific sociocultural factors that shape the lives of Pakistani women, thereby contributing to a feminist literature that values diversity, agency, and context-specific insights. This contribution serves to situate Pakistani women within the global discourse on feminism, an intersectional and localized feminist praxis.

The analysis of selected Pakistani English poems reveals a sustained poetic engagement with feminist resistance—especially as it relates to economic autonomy, voice, and identity. Drawing from Marxist and socialist feminist theory, the poetry under study constructs female subjectivities that challenge patriarchal norms, interrogate systems of gendered labor, and reimagine women's place within sociocultural and economic hierarchies. These poets use English a language historically associated with colonial authority—as a tool to reclaim narrative power and assert audacious women's identities that resist silence and submission.

Central to these findings is the notion of economic freedom as a feminist act. Rather than depicting women solely as victims of structural inequality, the poems often portray them as agents who navigate and contest systems of control—particularly those rooted in unpaid labor, economic dependency, and the devaluation of domestic or emotional work. Through lyrical expression, the poems explore how financial independence, intellectual autonomy, and access to choice are all deeply entwined with broader struggles against gendered oppression. This aligns with Elisabeth Armstrong's assertion that economic empowerment is not merely a material concern but a political one: it "confronts the material basis of women's subordination" and challenges the logic of capitalism that relies on invisible, unpaid reproductive labor (Armstrong 31).

Moreover, the poetic space becomes a symbolic realm for enacting resistance. Through the deconstruction of traditional gender roles and the re-articulation of selfhood, these works illustrate what Armstrong calls the feminist refusal to separate "domestic, reproductive, and waged labor" (29). The poems resist both the commodification of women and their confinement to roles of obedience, dependence, or silence. Instead, they celebrate female agency, emotional resilience, and intellectual assertion—hallmarks of social feminism rooted in lived, localized experiences.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the poems of Seher Hashmi and Fatima Ijaz, filling an important gap in the contribution of Pakistani English poetry to feminist literary studies. The analysis demonstrated how these poets unravel deep-seated ideas about female inferiority and argue for empowerment and representation within a patriarchal society. Their poems offered delicate critiques of the ways in which society shapes female identity while celebrating agency and resilience. Indeed, through themes such as social feminism, intersectionality, and situated experiences, poetry by Hashmi and Ijaz underscores literature's power to effect real change and disentangle oppressive measures.

Furthermore, it brought to the fore the significance of poetry in providing a space for the articulation of marginalized voices and furthering the feminist discourse in Pakistan. By placing their writing within a wider context of feminist literary studies, they drew attention to the specific contribution of Pakistani English poetry something that has

long been overlooked concerning cultural and social change. The review not only fills a critical gap but sparks off further research into the emergent function of feminist poetry in the development of collective consciousness and gender equality.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter the main conclusions of the study that were directly related to the research questions or findings are presented. In order to examine how Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi's poetry reflects a social feminist viewpoint that shares experiences and the tenacity of women in Pakistani society, it drew on insights from their works. Along with recommendations for additional research, it also put the results in a larger context. In light of this, the following recommendations are well-positioned to act as a roadmap for future study of feminist themes in Pakistani literature, particularly those that emphasize social justice issues and voices that have not yet been heard.

5.1 Findings of the Study

Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi's poetry exhibits social feminism in an approach that is subtle, contemplative, and in fact, quite resistant. Their works negotiate not only the explicit structures of patriarchal domination but also the internalized and psychic aspects of female subjugation and freedom. In this way, they further what this study sees as the disentangling of bold women's identities; a process through which women begin to peel away these layers of enforced silence, responsibility, and obscurity to reclaim their inner voices and subjectivity.

From bell hooks' theoretical lens, mainly her view of intersectionality, the two poets talk about the mixed realities of being women in a South Asian Muslim, postcolonial, and urban setting. hooks says, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (Ain't I a Woman?). This idea is very important in Ijaz and Hashmi's poetry. Their female voices are defined not only by gender but also by class, language (writing in English), cultural norms, and urban settings. In poems they speak of solitude, displacement, or quiet rebellion, the poet shows how these intersecting factors give them very particular kinds of burdens and silences.

For example, Fatima Ijaz' lyrics are very introspective and deal with psychological separation, social conventions, and personal discussions of liberty; this corresponds to the multiple levels of suppression which hooks indicates when she states:

“Being oppressed means the absence of choices.” Ijaz’s poetic voice demands the restoration of those options even though it might be through intangible pictures and broken memories as a feminist claim for identity.

At the same time, voice and agency—another important theme in hooks’ feminist philosophy—becomes a major part of how these poets’ work. Hooks highlights the transformative power of speech when she says, “I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain inside me was so great that I could not continue living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to understand... to make sense of what was happening.” In both Ijaz and Hashmi poetic expression becomes a way of healing and dissent, a soft yet brave reclaiming of voice in mute societies.

Seher Hashmi shows how metaphors and allusions may be used to question the cultural and religious expectations imposed on women; she challenges the reader to re-assess these norms from within an embedded cultural framework. Her subtle yet assertive portrayals of female identity resonate with hooks’ view of narrative as having transformative potential: that telling one’s story, even softly, is an act of resistance and reclaiming.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s framework helps contextualize these poetic voices within broader politics of double and triple marginalization. Mohanty critiques the tendency of Western feminism to view Third World women as a homogeneous oppressed group. She writes: “It is only by understanding the contradictions in women’s lives, by analyzing the power relations that constitute those lives, that effective political action can result” (Mohanty). This insistence on contextualizing women’s experiences is crucial to understanding the feminist intervention made by Ijaz and Hashmi.

Both poets work from within Pakistan—not as exilic or diasporic writers but as negotiators of daily renegotiations of Pakistani womanhood. Their works are not concerned with fitting into a Western mold of feminism but with articulating resistance that can be understood within its own socio-cultural surroundings. By writing in English, often seen as a language of privilege, they walk the line between inclusion and marginalization. This reflects Mohanty’s idea of triple marginalization; women are marginalized on the axes of gender, class/culture, and language/power. Their poetry often

speaks from the margins; it does not romanticize victimhood. It raises everyday experiences—melancholy, longing, boredom, reflection—to sites of feminist awakening. It is not passive experience but space of emotional articulation and ideological resistance.

Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi's poetry subtly yet deeply renegotiates the gendered roles society ascribes to us by making corporeal spaces of poetry wherein audacious women voices speak, not just in dialogue with but through self-reflection, psychological mapping, and quiet resistance. Such poets do not question traditional gender expectations by negating femininity but rather, reclaim it on their own terms — thus speaking nuanced representations of female agency, silence, desire, and intellectual autonomy.

bell hooks would consider reclaiming voice and agency as part of their poetics. As she notes, "Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject." (hooks Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black). In Fatima Ijaz's poetry we see a self that travels through broken pictures, scattered places; memories and bodies come back to it. A lyrical but broken self resists the constraints patriarchal society wants to impose on it. Such breaking up becomes feminist because it does not allow the identity to become fixed and consumable: instead, Ijaz creates a mobile, reflective, sensitive female subject who fights against the quiet roles that family or cultural scripts have assigned her characters reclaim their voices through ambiguity: the refusal to be fixed or fully understood is itself a form of authority.

Seher Hashmi, on the other hand, intersperses fairly structured, culturally situated reflections that question societal norms on piety, modesty, and gender roles as well as expectations of submission. Her work provides counter-narratives to dominant ideologies. This seems to resonate with hooks' emphasis on liberator storytelling: "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side... a gesture of defiance that heals" (hooks *Talking Back*).

Hashmi's women speak back—not loudly, but with calculated clarity. Defiance finds itself in quiet moments: the refusal to perform emotional labor; the rejection of

confinement within the domestic space; an assertion of self-worth through art or solitude. These portrayals reflect intersectional experiences of gendered oppression—the struggle is internal and social, emotional and cultural. Through Chandra Mohanty's view, this poetry reflects a contextualized understanding of women's lived experiences. She says, "Feminist scholarship must be attentive to the micro-politics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, and to the macrostructures of domination" (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*).

Ijaz and Hashmi write from within Pakistan a place where gender, religion, class, and language come together to shape women's roles. These poets do not take Western feminist ideas completely. Rather, they show triple marginalization—as women, as creators in a patriarchal society, and as Anglophone writers who do not belongs entirely either to mainstream Urdu literary circles or to the global Anglophone canon. Their poetry speaks from within these intersecting locations; it resists both global homogenization and local silencing. By focusing on feelings, home life, and faith they make a beautiful place where women's stories are important and meaningful, not small or extra. These women are brave not because they say no to rules but because they change and give new meaning to them. Their poetic voices take back the right to say who they are—as loving people, thinkers, creators, and those with faith—above and beyond tight social rules. Furthermore, the untangling of audacious women' in the poems is both political and poetic. It is a way of naming oneself, turning away from nonexistence, and taking back power in daily places. Their boldness lies not in saying no but in quiet breaking which fits well with Mohanty's work for feminisms that come from real, situational fights rather than pushed beliefs.

Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi's poetry forms an integral part of the change in cultural views about women by questioning deep-rooted gender norms and providing a challenge to restrictive cultural scripts on which women's identities are built. They recreate women's identities through self-representation. This poetic transformation works at all levels, but most essentially at the level of female subjectivity, where there is a quiet, brave unraveling that creates space for alternative modes of being, feeling, and resistance.

From bell hooks' framework, mainly her focus on intersectionality as well as voice and agency, we understand how both poets write against a background of overlapping systems of domination — patriarchy, class, linguistic elitism, and sociopolitical conservatism. Hooks notes: "Being oppressed means the absence of choices" (hooks Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center). It is precisely this lack of choice that these poets disrupt. Ijaz and Hashmi make poetic places where bold women speak their thoughts, show who they are, and picture tomorrows beyond the limits of old roles. Their poems turn into a way to take back, to give voice to much-muted lives.

In verses that speak to common estrangement, physical self-governance, and feeling of being emotionally apart, these poets come to what hooks names a "radical space of possibility" (hooks, *Talking Back*). This is a place where women are not just responding to subjugation but forging new stories grounded in their real experience. Such stories challenge the stereotypes of passivity and vulnerability; they show women as thinkers, makers, and multifaceted agents of change.

From Mohanty's point of view, this poetic change links with her plea for a context-based understanding of Third World women's lives. Mohanty cautions against making the "Third World woman" a general category of a simple, powerless victim. Rather, she highlights the need for local, historical, and structural analyses that account for differences within the oppression of women.

Ijaz and Hashmi show this belief by depicting women not only as holders of pain but as agent balance multiple layers of identity, resistance, and belonging in Pakistan's specific socio-cultural setting. Mohanty also speaks of double and triple marginalization evident in how both the poets face gendered, linguistic, and class-based exclusion. Writing in English within a setting where Urdu is valorized as the cultural lingua franca these women stand at the margins of languages placing them at linguistic marginality even as they English as a tool for self-articulation. Writing in English is, in itself, such a bold act of defiance—taking back a space so often denied to women writer native to the language.

Their poems do not seem to ask much of an outright rebellion; rather, they try to find revolutions within—transformations aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual. It is this fine

shift that matters: by taking on daily struggles and inner consciousness, they broaden the feminist resistance landscape past binaries (conservative vs. modernity; the West vs. East) to a more nuanced, intersectional understanding of womanhood.

Drawing from Marxist and socialist feminist theory, the poetry under study constructs female subjectivities that challenge patriarchal norms, interrogate systems of gendered labor, and reimagine women's place within sociocultural and economic hierarchies. These poets use English a language historically associated with colonial authority—as a tool to reclaim narrative power and assert audacious women's identities that resist silence and submission.

Central to these findings is the notion of economic freedom as a feminist act. Rather than depicting women solely as victims of structural inequality, the poems often portray them as agents who navigate and contest systems of control—particularly those rooted in unpaid labor, economic dependency, and the devaluation of domestic or emotional work. Through lyrical expression, the poems explore how financial independence, intellectual autonomy, and access to choice are all deeply entwined with broader struggles against gendered oppression. This aligns with Elisabeth Armstrong's assertion that economic empowerment is not merely a material concern but a political one: it "confronts the material basis of women's subordination" and challenges the logic of capitalism that relies on invisible, unpaid reproductive labor (Armstrong 31).

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Moreover, findings suggest that Pakistani English poets engage in a form of poetic labor that is inherently political. Their verse resists the erasure of women's stories by embedding acts of survival, rebellion, and renewal into language. The audacious women portrayed in these texts are not merely resisting oppression—they are redefining

what it means to be visible, to speak, and to matter within the structures that have historically tried to silence them.

To conclude, looking at Fatima Ijaz and Seher Hashmi through the intersectional feminist lens of hooks and Mohanty makes it evident that these two poets undertake a highly complex poetic endeavor in voicing silenced realities, claiming agency through expression, and negotiating various sites of marginalization. Their works challenge dominant social norms not by overt rebellion but rather by reinterpreting silence, solitude, and aesthetic experience as acts of feminist resistance. It is in this reframing that the complicated women's identities are initiated—not only in defiance but also in reflection, expression, and the relatively quiet bravery of speaking from within the margins. Ijaz and Hashmi's poetry subverts the societal gender roles by providing sophisticated, multi-faceted images of women's subjectivity based on intersectional experiences with an aim to have their voices heard as they are. Their works reiterate that poetic expression is not merely reflective resistance but rather a site of feminist struggle, healing, and transformation.

5.2 Implications of the Study

This study tried to untangle audacious women's identities, which defy ingrained gender roles and help them to fight for their rights. This study has sociocultural importance as it explores how these poets deal with internalized gender roles, censorship, and patriarchy in Pakistani society. Ijaz and Hashmi use their poetry as a tool for social critique and protest, challenging and critically evaluating the norms through their poetic works. It manifests poetry's double functionality: the ability to mirror everyday reality and to bring about change by making conscious, expressing the need for, and discussing women's rights.

This study enhances the recognition of Pakistani women poets, particularly those writing in English. In the realm of Pakistani Literature, the poetic trailblazers have established a foundation; however, contemporary poets who carry and advance feminist issues in their poetry surroundings and expressions are identified, thus expanding the literary conversation.

This study furthers the cross- humanistic conversation between gender studies and cultural theory by new angles on feminist poetics in South Asian Literature. It enriches the feminist literary discussion through fine elaboration of how language and form relate to identity and resistance, applying a theoretical construct to poetic works.

This study thus expands what is already surveyed in the literature, by engaging with feminist poets of the earlier generation whose work has somewhat prefigured and prepared the terrain for contemporary voices, such continuity indicates an emergent poetic tradition that continually battles against inequity and rose up women's experiences. As such, this study pays homage to past work and advances present discourse on gender, identity, and empowerment through poetry.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights and examines various aspects, important research gaps are left which require further investigation. Comparative analysis can explore the similarities and differences between Pakistani feminist poetry and that of its sisters in other South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Such a study would shed light on how themes like patriarchy, gender equality, and social justice are expressed in different cultural landscapes standing in South Asia, thus contributing to an understanding of common regional issues and unique national perspectives in feminist literature.

A broader-based study that includes women poets from different languages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds in Pakistan would also reveal a much more comprehensive picture of feminist expressions in the country. Integration of voices from the rural and urban and marginalized communities would bring out, in future research, the distinct challenges and capacities that women have within different cultural and social settings.

A historical approach that traces the development of feminist themes in Pakistani poetry would highlight the intricate interplay of changing social, political, and cultural influences on feminist literary expressions. It helps understand the relationship between poetry and changes taking place in gender roles and changing social attitudes together with progress on the women's rights front in Pakistan.

Furthermore, such a reading can also be filtered through theoretical frameworks like Decolonial Feminism to see how the histories of colonization continue to define gender relations in Pakistan. A transnational feminist reading might, on the one hand, bring out the relationship between Pakistani feminist poetry and the issues at play in global feminism, pinpointing how feminist thought moves across cultures and Diasporas. Such an approach would, therefore, present a much more detailed and multilayered reading that could bring the local and global dimensions of the production and consumption of feminist literature into greater focus.

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APPENDIX

1. After All Those Years

I spent balancing
On tippy toes
After all those nights
I folded, unfolded
Ironed, hung ready
In vain
After all those tea cups
I drowned alone
After all those fears
I caked up underneath
Pretty pink pouts
At last, you appear
When it's too late
I have already set sail alone
Because Odysseus doesn't have
To be male anymore.

2. Finally I Got a BMW

Suddenly I started existing
Good riddance……
Visible to human eye
Not just a dusty dingy image in rear view
Now I have a right to do whatever I want to
Say what I wish to
Whatever language, accent, dialect
No problem all sound chic, it has to
Dress up the way I feel like
Reverse park taking my sweet Barbie time
Blocking traffic behind, causing a bottleneck
Wave back my hair biting left corner lower lip
While tinting my pout in back view
All is fine, allowed coz I got zero meter
Metallic screeching, honking
Certificate of humanity by my side
Its shimmery body
Waves privilege, a token of existence
On my own whims, wishes, intentions
Before BMW happened
I was nothing but a crazy mother
Daring school run in 2005 model
Divorcee Lumina, deserted twice
A stigma, a blatant crime against vanity
Odd one out, brining shame for herself
Causing other inconvenience

Pursed lips, averted eyes
Pity borne visages as if I was a decrepit
Without legs to stand on my own
Trespassing into high street parties
On shoulders of filthy rich old men
Pretty woman without class, status
Breeding, posh schools references
Relying on Richard Gere's crutches.

3. Spill Me Free Falling

Feet tinkling
On corrugated tin roof
Pitter patter, slow death
Drip drop what's left unsaid
Wanting letters, syllables
Phoneme their arrangements
Solid symbols for volume
But what do they have
For Fluid
How do you utter what
Ends at beginning
Which further coils back
Into spiral origin
Voice for silence
Words for thoughts
How do you articulate
What echoes
Reverberates
Long after its gone
Shadow unexplained
Spirit wandering
About in vain.

4. Here I Am

After being stripped off
Layers and layers of skin
After being flayed off
Inner most thoughts, wishes
Even infinitesimal dreams
After being snatched off
Fetal ideas, their downy feel
After divulging I'm also
Born with same flawed anatomy
Ailing heart, aging kidneys
Like rest of human species
Here I am

No big daddies
No group of industries
No policies, sans narratives
Not even cannon of my muslimanity
Trapeze down life carrying wicker
Stuffed with shame, honor, dignity
Its porcelain fragility my eternal responsibility
Nothing of that sort either
Just me
Very flawed, loopholed me
Like every other human
Nothing extra-terrestrial
Making a claim, unwilling to cower
In my shitty brown skin
Fungi passport
Frail feminine feet
Not asking for something extraordinary
Nothing lux
No branded bourgeois demand
Pretty ordinary
Comes to others for free
Like basic neutrals
Found in everyone's cupboard
Missing in mine
Ever been so
Just few chunks
Even leftovers will do
Half eaten pies
Nibbled on fries
Gnawed on bread
Just.....
Few fallen grains of
Humanity.

5. I Exist

Somewhere beneath
Layers and layers
Of shame, its blame
I exist
Somewhere hidden
Out of sight
Wrapped tight
Behind folds and folds
Of how I should be
I exist
Some universe out in space

Away from continents
Of color and faith
Perhaps
Yet undiscovered
I exist
Some Neverland
Of will, pride and pleasure
Where ocean falls into
Streams
Where lions mewl
Cry bitterly
I exist
Some nook behind
Old Banyan tree
Buried with
Rags and shreds of
Puckers and cunts
I exist
Some spot may be hole
Dug deep
Wilted grass overgrown
Gagging for life
Like a voodoo doll
Punished for sins
Not mine
I exist
Some island sneaked
Up on land and sea
Away from Porsche's drive
Off villas sublime
Parties, drinks, pleasantries
Channels and Guccies
I exist
Some niche, on outskirts
Of humanity
Demarcated fields
Of black, brown and white
Banished, forlorn
In purgatory
I exist
Some levels below lines
Like an unstressed syllable
A letter remains silent
Of a misspelled word
I exist
Some sphere uninhabited

Breaking off from
Gangs of fear
And its usual bitchy peers
I exist
Somehow wriggling out
Of noose
Scavenging stares
Grizzly gropes
I exist
Some constellation, hung unaware
A white dwarf star
Core exhausted
Luminance out
Aching to reincarnate
I exist.

6. Women Without Men Are

Found scribbled on
Public toilet walls
No one admits discovering
Obnoxious improv on erotic puns
Foul disarray of graphic fall
You ask your young girls
To rush past, or simply turn away
Reek of promiscuity chalked out
On boys' toilet, murals of vindictive art
Shunned by all
You pretend not reading even
If comprehended
Relished, licked its
Tiniest crumb off your burning lips
At a mere glance
Women without men
Stay vaguely silhouetted
Smudged toilet graffiti
Ashen lines, gothic arcs
Outlined in utter frustration
Chipping off from pale urine walls.

7. The Shade of Longing

Terribly alone and old-fashioned like
the brick-a-brac sold at a potter's wheel
or the crowds dissipating; the open-wound of the concert
saying good-bye

What is the language of the sun?
Does it cut and burn the eye-lash
or does it hold steady
like a still-life guava on a fruit platter?

Starfish stutter to your whereabouts &
a lazy, languid moon on the chase.
I account for the difference in the mirror
of my own gaze; a hibiscus flower, witling.

Do I come upon a lotus in a pond
Once upon a memory? Or does it instead
Reach out to me with hands longer than
Elliptical staircases leading to the nuns' quarters?

Do you thing we become in the end
characters of our own stories? Do we finally
own them enough to discard them, have the infinite power
to reform our mind of its strange habitat?

I guess writing is a petty form of the art of living.
It`s done in obscure corners, dim lit caravans,
moving metaphors of cryptic ruin.
It is not where the sun shines and lives.

Sometimes I emerge out of my own writings,
Frightfully whole, like a tree's shadow.

8. The Rejected Girl

It was a delicate twilight that draped the world.
She slipped into the night.
There were wolves in the forest,
She counted on her fingers, the stars that kept up the trace.
Deep in the dungeons of despair
She resembled pressed lilacs in forbidden books
She opened to page 52, the tower trembled,
Ghosts, spiders and crabs opened their mouths.

It couldn't be wrong it couldn't be right.

9. Obscurity

Something regal emerges out of the blue sun
An obscure as forgotten times.
Can it be, that I, fearless, swan
Shall rise out of the black ashes?
Can it be, that the lost, shall return to me?

10. Princess of Sorrow

So many moons adjoin
to keep the secret
of a princess who fell in her
own castle's waters

She had been following a sparrow
whose red, beating heart was arrhythmic
but as she reach for its wing,
she slipped.

The water was mesmeric cold
and numbed her soul
she knew she was dying
and she gazed one last time
at the sparrow – it was flying.